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Paul, the Wharf-rat; or, The Detective's Blind.

BY JO PIERCE.



"MISCHIEF UP, FER SURE! WHAT IS IT? RIVER THIEVES, OR SOME OTHER KIND OF VERMIN!"

Paul, the Wharf-rat;

OR,

THE DETECTIVE'S BLIND.

The Story of the Seagrief Racket.

BY JO PIERCE,

AUTHOR OF "BOB O' THE BOWERY," "FIVE
POINTS PHIL," "BUCK BUMBLEBEE,"
"JAUNTY JOE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN IN THE WAY.

"AM I safe, or is my life in danger?"

Isaac Ogden looked around the room as he spoke, and his manner was that of one whose judgment answered his own question in the negative. There was the light in his eyes which only fear can bring, and it seemed as if he thought a foe might spring up at any point.

There was a knock at the door, and he hastened to open it in response. A young girl stood outside. He addressed her hurriedly.

"What luck, Amy?"

"I've got 'em all, sir," she replied.

"Bring them in!"

She entered, and from under her apron came a package. His eyes brightened at sight of her burden. He took it quickly and put it away.

"Go, now," he directed; "don't let them see you here. And, Amy, you'll be discreet, won't you? Don't let them know of this matter, at all. It would be bad for you, and there's no knowing what it would do for me—it might be the ruin of me—if I am not ruined, already."

Ogden sighed as he spoke, and the girl looked sympathetic, but did not pause to express her feelings. She had her directions, and obeyed without delay, and he was left alone.

Undoing the package, a door-bolt and a screw-driver came to view. He proceeded at once to affix the bolt upon the door; but, as a good and strong lock was upon the door already, it was evident that he sought to make entrance doubly difficult, for his own safety.

"They can't get in unknown to me," he soliloquized. "Of course there is no way to guard against a forcible assault, but that I must risk until I can make arrangements to get out wholly. Providence hasten the day!—this suspense is wearing upon me more than I feel able to endure. I must get away!"

The hour was past supper-time, and as he had no further need to go out of the room, he allowed the fastenings to remain and sat down.

He fell into deep thought and remained in that condition for a long while. Whatever was troubling him it weighed heavily upon his spirits, and the passage of time brought no relief.

Outside his little room two persons were at the same time engaged in conversation. They were Irad Russell and his wife, Anna. They were the keepers of the house, and distant relatives of Mr. Ogden.

"It must be done to-night!" declared Irad.

"This thing makes me nervous!" confessed the wife.

"It will soon be over. Think of what we have to gain."

"Shall we gain it?"

"Can the old man beat us both out? No, no; such a possibility is not to be thought of, woman."

"Isaac may have taken some one into his confidence, for I feel sure he suspects something."

"Nonsense! You should not let such ideas get into your mind. You harp on the subject, but I'm sure it is only the old man's increasing eccentricity which you have noticed. He is breaking down fast, and if we dared to wait a bit we should not need to resort to extreme measures. Wait we cannot, however, since he has such plans in his head, and the blow will have to be struck this night. When it is done—think of that!"

Mrs. Russell shivered.

"I wish I could avoid thinking of it!"

"Bah! don't be weak!"

"Irad, do you believe in judgment coming to persons?"

"No, I don't and you don't, either—at least, if you do you are not to say so. I don't want any croaking, woman. See? This must go through—it must!"

Outside the house the rumble of city life was to be heard in the pause which followed. The bustle of day life was in a great degree done, but the city never slept, and its echoes came like a deadened reminder of the fact that there

were others who lived and had an interest in things which, in the opinion of a guilty person, concerned only himself.

Anna Russell thought of this; she remembered the great reputation which the police of New York had acquired, and dreaded the hour when she would have cause to fear the very glance of a police eye and touch of a police hand.

Crime makes cowards of the novice in sin.

Amy Dunn had gone to the kitchen after leaving Mr. Ogden. She was the most humble member of the household; in fact, she occupied a position more than negative, if such a thing could be. She had come into the family as an object of charity, as all outsiders understood, but the Russells never had been at any loss on her account.

From the first she had been a drudge, and had been made to more than pay her way. She was, however, not credited with the usual amount of common sense, and against this verdict never had rebelled. Patiently she had toiled on, and taken whatever of slight and injustice had been put upon her.

In truth, she was not of brilliant intellect, and when she had reached her part of the house, on this occasion, she only meditated dully on the fear she knew was in old Isaac Ogden's mind.

"I would go away, if I was him," she thought, mechanically.

This was all the attention she gave to the matter; then she did the work which was to wind up the day, and retired for the night.

Her room was directly over that occupied by Ogden. Once there, she could hear faint sounds which showed that he was moving around, but she lay down and was soon asleep.

Time passed. Finally she awoke. There was upon her the impression that she had been aroused by some unusual circumstance, but what it was she could not tell. The whole house seemed to be quiet enough, and footsteps on the sidewalk outside were distinctly audible.

"I hope it ain't 'most mornin'," she murmured, with the natural ideas of one whose life was that of a drudge.

She turned over to go to sleep again, but at that moment voices sounded in the room below.

"He's up late," she remarked.

Then came a cry from below which made her sit up suddenly in bed.

"Help!" the voice had implored.

Her eyes grew large and wondering.

"What's that?" she exclaimed. "Can burglars have got into his room, in spite of his bolts and bars?"

Possibly her idea was correct, for she could hear a stir below as if some one was engaged in a struggle, and it dawned upon her that she ought to do something about it. She slipped out of bed and hurriedly threw on her wrapper. Thus equipped she left her room and started down the stairs.

Russell and his wife slept near the door, and to their room she went at once. The door was ajar, and she pronounced the name of her master. No reply came.

Again she called, but with like result. Then she walked in boldly.

Dark as it was it did not take her long to make one discovery—the Russells were not in bed.

"I guess they've gone to help him, already," she decided.

She lacked the element of cowardice—perhaps of due caution—and went on to Ogden's room.

When she reached it she saw a light under the door, but nothing more of interest. She put out her hand to touch and turn the knob, but at that moment she heard voices within. In the first she recognized Irad's peculiar tones, and in the reply, that of Irad's wife.

"What are you whimpering about, woman?"

"This is a deed which will haunt me!"

"The older you grow the more foolish you get. You make me very tired. What have we done? Simply acted to save ourselves, as any sensible persons would. Now, don't get to acting the goody-goody, for it don't go in practical life. See?"

"Irad, I shall be afraid of Isaac Ogden's ghost!"

"Will you let up on such fool talk? I won't hear any more of it, and if you don't stop I'll serve you as we served him."

Amy heard and murmured:

"I wonder how they've served him? I'll ask him in the mornin'."

Conversation continued inside.

"We must leave no signs behind us," pursued Irad. "See to it that you efface all, and when I am gone, this is the task which must occupy you. See?"

"I hope nobody heard him call."

"Don't worry. At this hour folks are not lying awake to listen for such things, and then, again, there is nobody near at hand."

"There's Amy."

"I had forgotten her."

Irad spoke thoughtfully, and then added:

"I'll go and take a look into her room. I don't doubt that she's sleeping the sleep of the just and the foolish, but it will do no harm to make sure. I'll go and look."

His footsteps sounded, and Amy was not stupid enough to remain and court certain discovery. Not yet did she realize what might have been done below, but she held Irad Russell in awe, and was not anxious to have the weight of his anger visited upon her. She promptly retreated and made her way back to her own room.

Irad's step soon sounded at the door. He paused and listened, but the silence which prevailed did not put his fears at rest.

He entered.

Amy lay very quiet. She had a vague notion that she ought to follow a certain line of conduct which would deceive him, but was not sure how to do it. As a result she did what was the best thing to do under the circumstances and simply kept still.

Russell's anxiety was evinced still further by his next move. He found and lighted the lamp, and then advanced close to her and looked down at her face.

By that time she was very much alarmed, and it was a wonder the fear was not expressed in her face, but Irad did not see anything to worry him. After a long survey he turned away with the muttered comment:

"The fool is the same as dead!"

It was a natural decision, yet the time might yet come when he would learn that even the supposed sleep of a "fool" might have elements of danger.

He went out, and once more Amy was left alone. She had no intention of investigating the state of affairs down-stairs, however. Her fear of Irad was too great for that; so she lay still, yet not without natural curiosity.

"I wonder what it is they are so anxious to keep from me?" she thought. "Isaac Ogden is afraid of them. I wonder if they have done him any harm? I'll ask him in the morning."

The night passed without further experience of moment, as far as Amy knew, and in the morning she went down to her usual duties. Contrary to his custom Irad was up, and sent a sharp and not over-friendly glance at the girl when she came in, but her immature mind was as much at ease as if nothing out of the common order of events had occurred, and she gave him no alarm.

Breakfast was prepared and eaten, but Isaac Ogden did not make his appearance to take part in it. This was not an unheard of thing, for he was often late in rising, but there was a new departure ere the meal was over.

"Old Ogden must be about in Albany, now," remarked Irad, suddenly.

Mrs. Russell gave a nervous start.

"Yes," she agreed, feebly.

"He'll get tired of that bum city before he's been there a month," added Irad.

Mrs. Russell moved uneasily.

"I hope he'll get along well with his business."

It was clear that Irad's wife was expected to do her part to keep up this conversation, but she failed to do so, and her liege-lord glared at her reprovingly and angrily.

"It's a nice trip to go up on the Albany boat," resumed Russell, perseveringly. "I wish I could have gone with the old fellow. Yes, he must be in Albany, now."

"Probably."

The wife managed to put in her word, at last, and Irad looked a little more pleased, but as far as present things were concerned, all this by-play was thrown away. Amy heard dimly, and realized that they were saying that Ogden had gone to Albany, but more than that she did not seek to learn.

If she had put her ideas into words she would have voiced the opinion that it was nothing to her where Isaac or anybody else was then located. Nothing mattered to her, since she was merely a family drudge.

Presently Irad donned his hat and stepped out upon the street. Going to work, it was supposed.

Amy continued work as usual, and among other places she visited to make order out of confusion was Ogden's room.

She was very sure she had heard him retire, the previous night, but the bed was unrumpled, now. As Mrs. Russell never did chamber work this was surprising, and Amy looked around to

make certain there was nothing undone which ought to be attended to.

As she did so she noticed a peculiar fact.

The wood of which the bed was made was of plain ash, and on the yellow thereof she observed a bright, red spot. She touched it—it was not yet fully dry, and was of a most suggestive nature.

She shivered, and then went at the spot with her scrub-cloth. The spot was not hard to eradicate, and was soon removed.

"I'm glad of that!" murmured Amy. "It made me nervous—it looked just like blood!"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHARF-RAT AT HOME.

THE North River flowed with a peaceful sweep down past the pier where a boy of something like fifteen years was sitting in a thoughtful mood and watching, without any coherent idea of his own intentions, the progress of the ferry-boats as they passed back and forth between the New York and Jersey shores.

A man came from the street and was at once made the recipient of critical attention.

"Goin' in swimmin' at this hour?" mentally inquired the boy, as calmly as if it was the prevailing custom to go swimming at all other hours in the vicinity.

If such had been the programme it was changed, for the man only looked around closely and then turned and went back.

"Call again!" invited the boy, under his breath. "My name is Paul o' the Piers—better known as Wharf-rat Paul. This 'ere is my office. Come early an' avoid the rush!"

There was a cheerful air in keeping with this conceit, which, possibly, would have recommended the boy to the object of his remarks had the latter heard them, but all had been done and said so softly that the elder man was not aware he had been so near to any one else.

The pier seemed deserted, and there was no good reason why it should be otherwise.

The person who had referred to himself as Paul o' the Piers did not expect anything of interest in addition to what he had seen, and as the man disappeared he took his attention from that quarter.

Several minutes passed.

Suddenly footsteps again sounded and a human form approached. Paul at first supposed it was the same man whom he had seen before, but as he looked closer he perceived a difference in height between them which did away with the idea.

Unlike his predecessor this wanderer acted as if he had some cause for fear or anxiety. He skulked down the pier and looked to the right and left in a singular manner.

"Be the perleece after him?" wondered the Wharf-rat. "Looks like it, though it don't foller that jest because he moves in a sartain way he has the blue-coated gents fer enemies. Honest men hev foes in New York, an' they don't carry brass buttons, either."

The stranger had come to a stop on the coping of the pier. He stood looking down at the water in an odd way, only turning, now and then, to glance up the pier as if he expected some enemy to appear and assail him.

No one came, and he soon ceased to look back and gave all his attention to the water.

Paul grew restless.

"Kin it be he is considerin' the committin' o' susanside?"

The boy had heard of such things along the water-front before, and the suspicion was but natural. It was a melancholy feature of city life that all men did not find existence pleasant, and more than one of them sought a means of ending his troubles which was mournful in spite of what the world considers the cowardice of the act.

"B'jinks! I'll interview him!"

With this resolution Paul left his perch and walked down the pier.

He was not heard until close to the unknown, who then turned around with a nervous start.

"Steady, general!" advised the boy. "Thar ain't no earthly reason why you should git excited over a small matter. I'm a good an' loyal citizen, an' you may ez wal put that sotter wild look out o' your face an' come down ter biz. See?"

The wild look certainly was in the man's face; he seemed on the point of running away, but finally changed his mind as he noted what an apparently harmless person was before him in the form of the boy.

"Young fellow," he answered, "who are you?"

"Paul Peters, the Patent Promotor and Pier Patrol. That's me."

The explanation did not explain much, and the sober, questioning look was still on the speaker's face.

"What are you doing here?" continued the stranger.

"Pipin' you!"

"Doing what?"

"Guess you ain't up in modern language, accordin' ter the system of Hoyle an' them other fellers. I'm only snoopin' around a bit ter relieve the monotony of the dark night. See?"

"You were not sent here by certain men?"

"Not a send! I owns up to no boss. I'm the Wharf-rat, independent, I am!"

"And you are not my enemy?"

"Wal, not ter my knowledge, and I knows a heap about my own business."

"Are you honest?"

"Honest? Well, I should snicker! Ef you knew me ez my bosom frien's do, you wouldn't never think o' propoundin' sech an interrogatory ter Paul Peters. I'll admit I'm ez homely ez a hedge-fence, ez the hay-seeds say, but you kin jest bet I'm on the square every time. Fer the affidavit thereto apply ter the chief o' police. He's had my help so many times he's posted on my qualifications ter a seat on the bench o' Justice."

All of which did not have much of any meaning to the stranger, who seemed suspicious and despondent.

"Well, boy, if you are all right," he replied, "you can do me a good turn. If you are all wrong, you can do me an ill turn. Which may I count on? Answer right to the point, as there is no time to lose. I'm in peril of my life!"

"Great guns! you don't say so! Who's tryin' to do you up, daddy?"

"Enemies, who are using me most unjustly; ay, who are even now hunting my life. Look there!"

He put the hair away from his face and a red stain was revealed.

It was that of blood, and his hair was matted with it all around the temple. Plainly, he had received hard usage, and the wharf-hunter was at once keenly interested.

"Wal, mister, I should say you had got the worst o' the argument, an' it looks like you was in a mix."

"They are still after me—may be here any moment."

The boy looked down the pier, sharply on the alert, now.

"Don't be afraid; it is I they seek to injure," reminded the unknown.

"Who is 'they?'" the Wharf-rat demanded to know.

"My enemies," was the unsatisfactory reply. "I have for the time thrown them off the track, but it is only a brief respite. They are on the trail, and if I do not get to some haven of refuge soon, I shall lose life at their hands. I am a stranger to the vicinity. Can you help me out of my difficulty?—can you hide me away from them?"

Paul was not especially impressed with the idea of helping a man who would not confide in him, and though the red stain had due effect, he was at-out to refuse, when he saw another form appear at the edge of the pier.

A man walked a few steps down toward the front, and then paused and looked around.

Paul's companion was not slow to discover him.

"They are here," he exclaimed, with new agitation and apprehension.

"There ain't but one, stranger, an' we can box him over the string-piece."

"Others are back of him—rest assured of that. They will find and kill me! See! there! The others are with him!"

It was a fact that the first person was not alone, then. At least one ally had joined him, and Paul knew they were searching for some one. They had stopped, and were looking around searchingly.

The stranger trembled pitifully.

"They will kill me!" he repeated.

The boy's sympathies began to be aroused. It did not appear like an equal fight when so many menaced one, and he threw aside his indifference.

"Boss, you just come with me," he directed. "I ain't no scientific dodger, but I reckon there is enough in me ter outwit sech p'isen snakes as them. Jest you foller my lead an' I'll see you don't git done up, this time. We'll slide off this pier onto the street afore they git onto the racket. See?"

"Yes, yes; if you know the way lead on!"

The reply was made with feverish haste, and the speaker brightened up amazingly.

"Come!"

Paul knew a way to creep along the side of the pier, but this purpose was thwarted by the movements of the enemy toward the couple at the water-end.

"Thunder!"

The Pier Patrol uttered the word in a sort of dismay as he saw the way of escape cut off, but was not long at a loss for resources.

"Git in between them two boxes!" he ordered.

"It's a tight fit, but better than bein' gobbled by the enemy. In we go!"

His companion was not eager, but Paul had a resistless way, and before anything more could be said the two were nestled down out of sight.

From the cover of the box Paul watched the advance of the foe.

"Kin you swim, mister?" suddenly asked the Wharf-rat.

"Not a stroke, my lad."

"Then we've got ter bolt fer it," the boy announced—"run fer it; but we'll try the sneak scheme, first. I ain't no idee it'll succeed. Ef the cry sounds out'r the still air that we're about, why, we must jest get a wiggle on an' scud like rats goin' to cover. Ketch on?"

"The plan seems fatal."

"Ain't it ez good ez ter set down here an' let them find us at their leisure an' sweet will?"

"You are right. Have your own way."

The searchers had come so near that the stranger's nervousness was increased, and he was ready for any move which promised an atom of hope of escape, while Paul's coolness created confidence in his young ally.

"Now fer the sneak. Come on!"

Paul led the way. Darkness was their best friend, but discovery seemed certain. The pier was well littered, so the man-hunters did not at once see the figures which were creeping along the edge of the pier, and Paul began to think escape was assured.

But whatever chance had existed was ruined by an unfortunate accident. The hunted man stumbled and fell.

"There he is!"

It was a chance guess from one of the hunters, but it put the young patrol on the alert. Satisfied that concealment was out of the question, he leaped to his feet.

"Run like sin!" was his brief order.

He was not obeyed. The stranger did not arise to his feet, dumfounded by the result of his own carelessness, and Paul, seeing this, sprung at him like a flash.

"Git a wiggle on! Don't you understand?"

His hand was on the man's collar, and the lad seemed to lift him from the planks.

"Now, let's do or die!" he exclaimed. "Foller me ef you want ter save yer bacon. Hustle!"

CHAPTER III.

A TIME OF KEEN SUSPENSE.

THE appearance of the two persons was a surprise to the hunters, and the fugitives thus got a fair start on the way to the street. Then another cry went up:

"There he goes! A hundred dollars to him who first lays hand on them!"

The young Patrol of the Piers caught his companion by the arm, and they got under way in earnest, and with the boy's pilotage crossed the street and turned into another thoroughfare.

"I hang out nigh here," Paul explained, "an' I'll jest take you ter my own den an' let yer rest till the storm blows over; so shake a foot, general!"

The pursuers were gaining, but the pilot could not make his charge into a sprinter. The outlook would have been bad but for the fact that they were near the desired refuge.

Paul quickly threw himself against a hall door near at hand and it flew back obediently.

"Tumble in, general!"

Tumble in the stranger did, when the boy at once closed and locked the door.

"That about settles it," he confidently remarked.

Footsteps sounded outside, and a knock came immediately after. The boy smiled.

"They must take us fer clams!" he added.

"Do the dummies suppose we hev had all this trouble only ter let them come in an' walk all over our collar-buttons? Wal, not ef Queen Vic knows her prerogatives."

The knock was repeated, but no attention was paid it.

The rescued man looked around, and, seeing he was in a place apparently safe, grew more composed.

"Boy," he remarked, "I shall never cease to be grateful to you for this great favor."

"Oh, yes, you will; you'll outgrow it," coolly replied the Pier Patrol. "Still, you kin feel that way now, ef you want ter; it won't strike in an' give you the mumps, I guess."

"They sought my life."

"They didn't get it: run up ag'in' a snubbin'-post, you see! When this scout of the West Side sets out ter do a thing, he likes ter make a good job of it, and that's about the size of this racket. I didn't ketch yer name, mister."

The rescued man hesitated.

"Call me John Joyce," he finally replied.

"All right; all things go in a dark day. Make it Adam Noah, ef ye say so. But see here, you an' me are inter this game over our shoes. It behoves me ter know somethin' about the individ' I am pilotin' around, don't it? I think so, anyhow. What's all this row been about, mister? Why was them men tryin' ter get the bulge on you?"

Joyce hesitated, but Paul was not to be put off so easily. He felt that he had rights in the case, and proceeded to make the fact known to his companion.

The latter was somewhat calmer now he was under a friendly roof, but each sound still gave him a nervous start. It was plain he had received a severe shock, and this was reflected in his reply.

"I must still ask you to excuse me from going into particulars," he requested. "All I can well say you shall know, for you have proved a friend in need, truly."

"I may be able ter do more," insinuated the rescuer, quietly.

"You are a noble young man, and I am very grateful."

Joyce showed a disposition to keep away from the coveted explanation, but he was not allowed the secrecy he sought, and he at last renewed the explanation.

"I am one who has been put by circumstances in a very peculiar position," he said. "It is not a matter of money, as you might suppose, for, though I am worth something, and others desire to get me out of the way and secure the wealth which looks as big as the hills of the Rocky Mountains to them, that is not why they are seeking to do me so much harm. It is because I hold the secrets of others and the happiness of a certain person."

"Who?"

Paul asked the question with his usual abruptness, but Joyce shook his head gravely.

"I am sorry, but I cannot tell you that. All I can tell is that these persons, in their blind hatred and zeal to acquire revenge on a helpless individual, are determined to let no obstacle stand in their way. You have seen the result—they seek to kill me in order to get a witness out of the way."

"You don't seem to progress much in your story, mister."

"They progressed in their hunt for my life. They assailed me to-night—how I need not say, yet I was saved only by a narrow chance. Escaping from their clutches I got down on the pier. I was then in a dazed condition, and incapable of acting with judgment, and if you had not so providentially come to my aid I should have been slain. That is sure."

Paul grimaced. Joyce was still far from calm, but he was sufficiently in his right mind so he was tenaciously holding on to his secret.

"You're one o' the white hen's chickens," dryly remarked the rescuer. "Wal, what do you mean to do, now?"

"Can you house me to-night?"

The question was very anxiously asked.

"I guess so."

"Do it, and you shall be rewarded."

"This ain't my mansion. The real estate I hold is mostly an' severally what I pick up under my finger-nails. This palace is holden by one Pike Norris, an uncle o' mine, an' him an' me ain't on sech good terms ez we might be. Ef he knew you had found shelter here at my invite, et would be jest like the mean critter ter h'ist ye out jest from spite. All depends upon keepin' your presence here secret from everybody but yer humble servant. Ketch on?"

"How can it be done?"

"Wal, a good deal depends on how long you want ter stay?"

"I should be glad to do that for some length of time."

Paul rubbed his nose thoughtfully as he considered the point.

"Et may be done, but I don't jestly see how. Still, we kin do our best. Nobody could do more."

"I'll pay handsomely."

"Money is good, but et won't accomplish impossibilities."

"Let it do all it can."

"We'll see."

The room to which Paul had conducted his charge was on the second floor. It was a large, square apartment, with a rolling floor, battered ceiling, and all the signs which go to make up the average tumble-down room of a tumble-down house, but it was a most welcome refuge for the man lately hunted.

Paul studied him with interest.

Joyce was about fifty years of age, and very intelligent of look. It was clear that he came from a good walk in life, but happiness did not go with his intelligence. He had a worn face and peculiar manner which did not need the nervousness of the present occasion to tell of hopes which had gone astray.

"Wender what in sin is the matter with him?" thought the boy.

Footsteps sounded in the hall.

"Old Unc Pike Norris!" suggested Paul. "Mebbe you'd better crawl under the table."

It was only a joke, but Joyce took it seriously and proceeded to obey the suggestion. Before Paul could take back what he had said the alarmed man had started for the table, and, though his ally did not expect intrusion from any one, he allowed the work to go on.

The boy's smile died away when the door opened without ceremony, for several men were visible beyond.

He recognized Pike Norris, but the others were strangers.

There was nothing in Norris's appearance to indicate he was an honest person, and Paul's knowledge of him did not further the possibility that he was. In fact, though he was barred out of all participation in his uncle's confidence, he was a good deal of the opinion that the latter would, ere that, have had trouble with the law if the law had been well informed.

"What are you doin'?" abruptly demanded Pike, glaring at his nephew.

"Wal, I seem ter be perusin' Shakespeare an' the other classics, don't I?" drily inquired Paul.

"Are you alone?"

"All in my lonesome."

"Have you seen any one about here?"

"No."

Paul could not fail to understand that the men with his uncle were Joyce's foes, come to light again, and he was not reluctant to stand by his own ally and deceive them if it could be done.

"Somebody has come inter this house," added Pike.

"I should say so!" quoth Paul, looking at the men behind Norris.

"We want to find them."

"D'y'e expect me ter help? I would, but I'm afflicted with the tic dolorous, an' several other malign complaints, an' they've sotter gone ter my brain. I can't work."

"What do you mean by such nonsense?" sharply demanded Pike.

"Nonsense? Unc, I ain't built that way; no nonsense don't never percolate from my knowledge-box!"

"Is this boy a fool?" inquired one of the other searchers, still more sharply. "Why do you waste time on him?"

"He is weak-minded," Pike answered, "but not so much so as he seems ter be. Paul, do you say you haven't seen the men we want?"

"Ain't seen no man but them I see now," coolly replied Paul, as he elevated his feet to the top of the table and looked very bland.

One of the party looked under the bed, but saw no man.

"There's other rooms," informed Pike.

"I believe this is the boy we see with our game on the pier, an' who come here with him," persisted the searcher, suspiciously.

"He's a tough lad, he is. Ef you think he's done wrong, do him up for it," Pike obligingly advised.

"Come off yer perch!" retorted Paul. "I may be a tough chicken in one sense, but you'll find me tougher ef you try ter play hobbs with me. No back talk, unc; et won't go."

He appeared very defiant, but the whole matter was a "bluff" to take attention from the more important affair. He could afford to anger Pike Norris if he could by so doing save the man under the table.

Pike's companions were not of the right sort to be turned from the main point by any trivial diversion, and the foremost continued to look suspiciously at Paul.

"I believe this is the very same boy," he declared, scowling at the boy in question.

"Notice the wart on my nose?" gravely inquired Paul.

"I noticed the general cut of your jib when

you were getting my man away. What have you done with him?"

"I pass! Don't ketch on at all."

"Do you mean to say it was not you? Now, boy, be careful! The man is a noted criminal, and you will only get yourself into trouble by tryin' ter shield him. Keep clear of the law, at all events."

"Ditto, you!"

Paul poked his friend under the table with his foot, afraid the latter might yield to fear and come out of his hiding-place. It was a most critical moment, for if the gang saw fit to continue the hunt they were sure to unearth the fugitive. Paul wondered it had not been done before, but the cover did not seem to occur to them. Besides the bed, it was the only refuge which would secrete any one, and it was proving more of a success than was to be expected.

"You brought him into the hall and fastened the door!" persisted the hunter. "Now, what did you do then?"

Paul shook his head.

"You ought ter consult a doctor. Your case is really a desperate one, by gum! Ef you keep on that way, there ain't no knowin' what will be the result. More doctor an' less whisky would do you a pile o' good!"

The investigator had grown angry, and he proceeded to express his feelings in emphatic language. Paul watched him closely, and looked at ease, but he could hear Joyce breathing under the bed, and the danger was not to be discounted.

"Barnes, you've got to use rigorous measures," declared one of the strangers who had previously been silent, addressing him who had spoken for all.

"What?"

"A little squeeze might work a world of good."

"True!"

Barnes turned to Pike.

"Have I permission to compel the boy to reveal?" he asked.

Pike hesitated, but Barnes slyly exhibited a bank-note, and the uncle gave way.

"Do what you think best," he agreed.

"Then I will make the kid talk, or have his life!"

CHAPTER IV.

ENEMIES MEET.

It was a sanguinary threat, but Barnes seemed equal to it. He had a bad face and the air which stamped him as one of the toughest of New York's tough citizens. He who had been silent so long was of different caliber, but it seemed that Barnes had been hired for a special purpose and was fully equal to it.

Found in the dregs of city life, he was one from whom any evil deed would occasion no surprise.

He moved toward Paul to begin the system he had marked out, but the latter remained surprisingly cool.

"Ef I was you I wouldn't do it, mister," the boy advised. "Any sech thing will make hard feelings."

"I know perfectly well that you are keepin' the whereabouts o' that feller secret from us. You've hid him, an', by thunder! ef you don't say where, I'll make you a sick kid! Where is it?"

As he asked the last question he essayed to grasp Paul by the neck, but the hold was evaded by a quick twist.

"Don't!" tersely cautioned the boy. "Et may be loaded, an' ef it is, you'll get everlastin'ly done up. See?"

Barnes made another effort, but if Pike had not given his aid and caught Paul all would have gone for nothing. As it was, the boy was in the toils.

"Now, you brat!" cried the tough, "ef you won't talk you'll take the consequences. I won't be fooled with by you. Where is our man?"

Again his hand sought the neck-hold, and the expression on each face showed it was no mere intimidation. Paul read the signs well, but his courage did not waver. It had become a battle between him and the enemy, and he was bound to defeat them if such a thing was possible.

He too, now had a plan. Discovery could not long be kept from Joyce, so the one thing to be done was to get the foe out of the room for a time and thus give Joyce chance to help himself.

Assuming a sullen air he growled:

"Keep yer choker off an' I'll tell the story!"

Hostilities were at once suspended.

"I knew it was you I saw with the old man!" triumphantly declared Barnes. "Now, where is he?"

"Come up in the attic."
Barnes looked suspicious.

"We hev been there."

"Pike Norris don't know this house so wal as he thinks he does. Ef I don't show you places he never heerd of you kin call me a liar. Drat it all! I ain't goin' ter git my head into trouble fer nobody. I won't promise the feller is up there, now, fer of course he would seize the first chance after bein' left alone, an' he see there was danger, ter skip out o' the house"—this was a hint to Joyce, and delivered slowly and carefully—"but I'll take you up in the attic. Come on!"

His apparent frankness had effect. All remembered that the attic was a wild and unfurnished place, and it was just possible that there might be a man still there, so nobody interposed any objection when Paul cheerfully rose to lead the way.

All went out of the room.

"If Joyce don't improve that chance he's a clam!" thought Paul, as he saw he had the whole gang after him.

The way was up a pair of rickety stairs, and the guide made all the noise he could without exciting comment. He brought them up in the attic, but the lamplight flickered around without revealing the fugitive.

"Make the circuit!" directed Paul. "Ef you don't find him I'll know what ter think."

The lamp was duly used, but neither the old boxes nor the dark shadows concealed the hunted person. Once more every eye was leveled upon the guide, and he was not unequal to the demands of the moment.

"Guess he's found his way out," was the nonchalant comment. "Here is the whole secret."

Going to one side he moved what appeared to be a fixed board, and an aperture beyond was revealed.

"Your daisy struck jest in time."

With a wave of his hand he indicated the space beyond, and they saw a roof. It was that of a rear annex. Beyond was the back yard with other back yards close at hand, and abundant room for any one to escape. Paul's artifice became clear.

"Did you really leave him here?" asked Barnes.

"That's the size of it."

"Why did you take him here, at all?" broke in an unknown man, fiercely. "What business had you to meddle with the case?"

"General, I ginerally do about ez I please. I'm a free American citizen, an' I don't stop ter go out in the street an' ask Tom, Dick an' Harry ef I kin do this or do that."

Paul spoke with the utmost nonchalance, and the force of his argument was not lost on the leader.

"I suppose we shall have to overlook it. Now, what are we to do next? What are the chances of our finding the person we seek, if we go out in the yard?"

Barnes was studying Paul's face sharply.

"Mr. Avery," he remarked, "I ain't yet sure our man has gone that way. There's a twinkle in this kid's eyes I don't like. I'll bet my socks he knows where the game is."

"Wash the socks afore you bet them!" advised Paul, with his usual composure.

The speaker became the focus of several pairs of eyes. All were inquisitive and threatening, but he bore the ordeal well.

Avery turned to Pike and asked him to use his authority decisively, but the uncle had to confess he did not possess any authority. He never had been more than an apology for an uncle to Paul, and since the latter had grown old enough to care for himself he had done so in the full sense of the word, and all intimacy between them had ceased. Naturally, when forced to shift for himself, Paul had also taken it upon himself to be his own master in all things.

Failing to make any impression, all returned to the room where the party had come upon the boy. The latter glanced at once at the table, expecting to learn that Joyce had taken advantage of his opportunity and got out of sight. He had a rude shock.

Joyce was still there!

The stupidity of the man, or what seemed to be that, was so marked that Paul was most completely disgusted. With his life at stake he had neglected a Providential chance, and there he was yet, ready for any trouble the foe might make him.

Ominous glances were leveled at Paul, but the bell of the outer door suddenly rung.

"I'll go down," remarked Pike. "It is some chance caller."

He went accordingly, and the others waited, but there was soon a new turn of affairs in the room. Barnes chanced to use his eyes and mind at the same time, and the possibilities of the table suddenly dawned upon him. He arose and moved toward the point where Joyce was finding his doubtful security.

Paul o' the Piers felt his own heart jump with apprehension. There was no real suspicion in the man's way, but he knew only too well that the situation did not admit of any such search.

"Didn't Pike call you?" he demanded, abruptly.

He held up his hand to request silence, and Barnes paused. Unfortunately there was no call from Pike, so the lull could be but brief, and Paul tried to further his scheme by sending out many more words in rapid succession and taking Barnes's thoughts from the subject which had claimed his attention.

The trick succeeded, but only for a moment.

Suddenly the searcher moved forward again and lifted the table-cloth.

There was no help for it, and Paul braced himself to meet the inevitable. The throwing back of the cloth revealed Joyce to all!

Earnestly as they had looked for their man, no one had expected anything at that time, and when they saw Joyce there, even glib Barnes was silent. He gazed in amazement, and only found words after a long delay.

"Thunder!" he finally managed to exclaim.

Avery drew a revolver.

"Shoot him down if he tries to injure you!" was the order.

Paul o' the Piers sprang to his feet.

"No shootin' here!" he commanded. "You ain't got inter no slaughter-house, an', b'jinks! you ain't goin' ter rage with voylence. No shootin', or you'll hev the perleece down on you in the shake of a deer's tail. Ketch on?"

Joyce had no weapon, and could not have begun hostilities if he had desired, but, checked by Paul's words, the enemy made no move.

Avery was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"The old man is cornered!" he jubilantly cried. "Take him out, Barnes!"

The latter needed no urging, and with one hand on Joyce's collar he brought him forth from cover. The prisoner was overwhelmed by his misfortune, and could only cower on the floor where he had been landed.

"Wal, I'll be hanged!" muttered Barnes, amazed at his own success. "Who'd hev thought it?"

Avery gave Paul a black look.

"The boy knew where he was, all the time!" he declared.

"The boy did," Paul agreed, "an' ef this gent had grasped onter his chances an' taken a skip when he could he wouldn't be here now ter be eat up by you pirates. Yes, the boy knew where he was. What be you goin' to do about it?"

The question was put in a matter-of-fact way, but it made Barnes glare his rage. Avery was less inclined to hostilities.

"You worked against us, but did no especial harm," he remarked. "We may see you later, but you're too insignificant to be noticed, now. We can afford to drop you." Here he turned to Joyce. "You see the folly of trying to beat us out," he added.

Joyce drew a deep breath, but had nothing to say.

"Your break has resulted in no more than a little inconvenience to us," went on Avery.

Joyce exhibited the red wound on his head.

"Is that nothing?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"It is the result of obstinacy."

"Obstinacy! Is that what you call a man's efforts to preserve his life?"

The question was pathetically put, and Paul felt a fresh thrill of indignation. Disgusted as he was at his companion's failure to improve his chance to get away, he did not forget that Joyce was wounded and, perhaps, suffering from more than usual indecision. Was he to be quiet while these men carried out their will? No! He was resolved to appear in the case again.

"I'm enlisted," he thought, "an' I'll hev it out with them ef I don't cave in in the tryin', by jinks!"

Once more the door swung open and Pike reappeared with several other persons close behind him. Clearly, they were not of Avery's party, and it flashed upon Paul that there was to be a new turn of events.

CHAPTER V.

WHO IS HE?

SOMEWHAT back in the ranks of the newcomers was a lady, but it was she who broke

the temporary silence which followed the surprise of their entrance.

Her eyes had taken in all the points of the room, and she now moved quickly forward and confronted Avery.

"Is it thus I find you?" she demanded, scorn and hostility in her voice, and indignation in the flash of her superb eyes.

Avery was speechless. He turned his own gaze slowly upon Joyce.

"Vile plotter!" the lady pursued, "is there no limit to your infamy and passion for crime?" He made a gesture of sullen protest.

"Infamy would be ashamed to recognize her pupil in you!" was the sarcastic addition.

The man addressed flushed slightly.

"Spare your contemptuous words," he answered. "We are foes—let it rest at that and not try to put on heroics. When I fight I do it without compunction. Call my way what you will; I strive to win, and if my means are not to your liking I care not. Keep your sarcasm to yourself, however; we need not bandy words, since we know we are foes."

She evidently took him at his word, and turned from him coldly. Her gaze was now upon him who had given the name of Joyce.

"Mr. Ogden," she spoke, "are we in time to save you from harm? Or have these brutes nearly killed you?"

Joyce shifted uneasily.

"I am wounded, but I think not fatally," he answered. "You have a party with you—I beg you will not leave me with these persons. Save me, I implore you!"

He put out his hand in a way which gave force to his last words, but surprise, more than anything else, was on her face.

"Certainly we will save you," she agreed.

"You do not think we would do otherwise, do you? Perhaps, Mr. Ogden, you are dazed by your hurt. You know me, don't you? I am Alice Vanner, and I am your old friend."

Joyce pressed his hand to his head in bewilderment.

"If you save me you are my friend," he agreed.

"Do you remember me?"

"I—I think I do."

Paul o' the Piers knew the statement was not true, for Joyce's manner plainly showed he did not remember anything of the sort, but the young lady was not so discerning.

"You shall go with us and be well cared for," she asserted. "Do you," and she turned to Avery, "intend to object to this?"

Avery did not reply at once. Miss Vanner had two men with her, but it was a force which could be overpowered easily. Force would continue him in possession of the field. Would it be prudent to exercise this force?

"Perhaps you want to see the inside of the police station," Alice suggested.

"I am not one to be intimidated," stoutly replied Avery, "but in this case the game does not seem worth the candle. You can take your man and do what you see fit with him."

As he spoke he moved toward the door, making a motion to his followers as he did so, and they all evinced a purpose to depart immediately. Paul o' the Piers observed this and grew uneasy. He looked at Joyce, and when it became clear that nobody else was to put in an objection, he spoke sharply:

"Say, does this go?"

No one appeared to care to what the question referred, but as the gang continued their retreat Paul added with emphasis:

"Here's a man with a wound on him like a slap-jack. Them p'ison critters did it. Be they ter be allowed to go free?"

Alice hesitated. Then she addressed Joyce:

"Do you want them arrested, Mr. Ogden?"

"No, no!" was the quick reply.

"Then they can go."

Avery and his heels had not waited for the decision, and their footsteps were echoing well down the stairs in a very short time.

"You'll be lucky if you don't see them outside," remarked Paul, warningly.

"There is much in that," Alice agreed. "We had better go. Mr. Ogden, are you ready to depart?"

"Where to?"

"To my home."

Joyce moved uneasily, and turned his gaze upon Paul.

"Once there," continued the young lady, "you will be free from all molestation. You know how loyal I am, and all my care shall be exercised to save you from further trouble, while if you do not take the aid I offer, you will be in as bad a situation as ever."

He seemed uncertain, but Paul wisely added:

"Yes, an' be pounced upon by them the moment you put yer head out o' the door. That's flat!"

The last argument could not but be convincing, and it had visible effect upon Joyce, but he looked at Paul in a peculiar way.

"This youth is a friend of mine," he finally remarked. "I would like to have some talk with him before we go out."

There was such evidence of apology in the request that Alice replied:

"Certainly; talk with him all you please, of course."

Joyce at once took Paul aside.

"This is the strangest thing I ever heard of," he declared, strongly.

"Why so?" the boy asked.

"I don't know this girl!"

"She knows you."

"So she thinks, but it is an error. She calls me 'Mr. Ogden.' I am not Mr. Ogden; my name is nothing of the sort. I am not the man she thinks me, at all. No, I have no friend or relative called Ogden. It is all a mistake."

Ordinarily Paul would have given due attention to this statement, but he now looked at the wound on Joyce's head and thought he had an explanation of all that was peculiar. To him it seemed that Joyce had been so dazed by the hurt that he had forgotten his own name and identity.

Looking at the matter in this light, he proceeded to humor the companion of his adventure.

"Wal, you can't afford to throw away the chance which is put in yer way. You want friends, an' you want them the worst way. You've got 'em right here in the gal an' her chums. Seems ter me you'll hev ter go along an' let things drift fer a while, makin' out that you be Ogden, as she says."

"So it looks to me, but there may be danger in it. I'll go on condition that you accompany me."

"But I ain't wanted."

"I'll fix that. If she is as much my friend as she claims, she certainly can't object to my having a sort of valet along to look out for me. Will you go? You shall be well paid."

Affairs were taking a turn wholly unlooked for, and Paul was not immediately ready with his answer, but the more he thought of it, the more he was inclined to take things as they came. He had no real home with Pike Norris—why shouldn't he take a new chance, now he had one?

"Go in!" he decided, tersely. "Ef you kin fix it, I'm with you ef my socks hold on."

Joyce returned to Alice and made known his wishes. There was much of doubt and concern in his mind, but he might have spared all of that. The proposal was accepted without question or hesitation, but as a matter of course, and it was decided that Paul was to go.

He had no preparations to make, and was soon ready for the venture.

Alice sent one of her helpers to summon a coach, and this was done. All went down and entered the vehicle.

Pike Norris had twice sold out to the highest bidder that night, and he was so uncertain as to how he would be held by the latest buyers that he kept out of sight. Avery and his band were not to be seen, and the coach rolled away without attracting any attention, as far as was to be noticed by the travelers.

Paul o' the Piers was keenly observant of their course, but he saw nothing to arouse suspicion. Toward the north they went, and were soon at the junction of Canal and Hudson streets. From that time their way was up the latter thoroughfare until they paused at a house thereon.

All alighted and entered, but only Alice, Joyce and Paul went to the parlor.

"Mr. Ogden," she then said, "will you have a doctor to see to your hurt, or shall I care for it? I do not think the injury is serious."

"Nor I," he replied, hurriedly. "Common dressing will be quite sufficient, or none at all."

"I will attend to it, then. Afterward we will all retire to our beds. It will be time enough to talk all these things over in the morning. Don't you think so?"

"I do, indeed."

Paul was not of the same mind. He still believed Joyce was out of his head and needed a good physician, but he did not see fit to interfere while there was no decided proof of his belief.

Alice dressed the hurt and showed real skill, asserting that it was nothing that need worry or incapacitate Joyce, and then serious thought was given to retiring. Joyce surprised his hostess by asking that Paul be given a bed on the

floor in his room, but she did not remonstrate, and the plan was carried out.

When the two were alone once more Joyce turned to Paul sharply.

"Isn't this amazing?" he demanded.

"Is it?"

"Most emphatically. I am not the man this girl thinks, and here she has housed me in her home under a mistaken impression. It is most extraordinary—especially, as she seems to take it for granted that I know her intimately. If the real Ogden does that she must know him equally well, and if such intimacy exists, how does it happen she has so blundered on my identity?"

The argument was that of a sane man, and Joyce's whole manner confirmed the belief that he was that, at that moment. Paul was staggered.

"How kin it all be?"

"Just what I wish to know."

"Didn't you never hear of her, or of Ogden?"

"Never!"

"Then it is funny, sure."

"I must look very much like him."

"Dead ringer, sure."

Joyce pressed his hand to his head and looked the image of wonder. Paul believed him sincere, and was about as much surprised, himself. He grew more than ever interested in the case.

"You knew Avery?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"An' she knew him, an' he knew her?"

"Yes, or, at least, so she says."

"Then how kin she hev you two mixed up?"

"I don't see. I remarked that he and I must look very much alike, but it was said thoughtlessly. I was never aware that we looked at all alike, and now I think it over, I am sure we do not. There can be no resemblance, I am certain."

"Then why does she think you are him?"

"That is the mystery."

"B'jinks, you're right!"

And Paul, thoroughly perplexed, blinked fast and energetically as he tried to grasp the secret of all this.

"I am now in this house," added Joyce, "but what is to come next I don't know. It is all a conundrum to me—all vague and mysterious. The girl has brought me here—what will happen next?"

CHAPTER VI.

PAUL CLAIMS ALL IN SIGHT.

THERE was nothing else to do, so the adventurers finally went to bed and to sleep. Paul at least passed a peaceful night. He was of the age when slight things never disturb the mind, and he had no necessity to fear the events of the morning.

Whether Joyce was equally blessed with rest was not explained, but he was there in the morning and in condition far better than was to be expected.

A breakfast-bell notified them that something was expected of them, and they dressed together.

"I wonder what sort of a jubilee we are ter hev now?" commented Paul. "This residence is hilarious, an' I should be sorry ter lose it. Stick ter yer grip, mister, an' hang on ter Ogden's identity, no matter whether your name is Ogden, Joyce or John Brown. Palaces don't grow on every bush. Stick to it, b'jinks!"

"I shall allow the error to go on for the time being, not because I hope for financial or other selfish gain, but because my personal safety must be considered."

"Certain, certain!" Paul declared, hastily. "Hang ter yer grip, mister; hang on! I like here!"

The Boy of the Piers was very much satisfied. He never had slept in such quarters before, and he was willing to have the benefit of them by day, as well as by night. As long as Joyce held his place, Paul intended to pose as his servant, companion, or something of the sort.

On going down-stairs they were met by a house-servant who informed them they were too late to breakfast with the rest of the family, but that it was all right, and they could take their time as it was. This they did, and one of them, at least, did full justice to the repast.

Later, they were escorted to the parlor, where they were speedily joined by Alice. She greeted them cordially and soon explained:

"The Mirabeaus are coming to see you, at once, Mr. Ogden."

"Are they?"

Joyce spoke blankly, and Paul felt sure he did not know the Mirabeaus from George Washington's statue.

"I trust it will soon be fully arranged," she added.

"Certainly, certainly."

"I will send them up as soon as they come."

"Very well."

Miss Alice soon went out, and then Joyce turned to Paul.

"The game is about up," he gloomily observed. "I can't hope to fool every one, and I don't know the Mirabeaus at all."

"Bluff it out, general."

"I doubt my ability. Last night it was the instinct of self-preservation with me, but now I have not that motive so vividly before me. I feel that the time is at hand when all will become known."

Paul was of the same opinion, but he was less ready to succumb to what seemed inevitable.

"While there's life there's hope, mister," he reminded. "Don't give up. We are now rollin' in the lap of luxury, an' you're safe from yer enemies, it seems. Stick ter the ship—stick! Do it, boss, an' let me inter the raffle!"

"It shall be done as soon as possible, for I am really afraid to go out. Let us hope all will be well."

"Ef the enemy stick you on hard questions, jest turn ter me; I'll help you out."

Joyce replied that he would do this, but his tone showed the promise to be purely mechanical. He underrated Paul and his powers of resistance and defense. This the latter did not do, and he waited with his imaginative fancy in training, prepared to do all he could to keep up their little artifice.

Shortly after the door-bell rung, and the announcement of the servant was hardly needed to convince them the hour of trial was at hand, but when told they were wanted they went to obey the summons. In the parlor they found an old gentleman and a lady of less years. The old gentleman did not wait to be introduced, but rushed forward and seized Joyce's hand.

"My dear Mr. Ogden!" he exclaimed, "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure. I am very glad to see you—I am delighted to see you!"

He shook the hand so warmly that Joyce began to feel he would do wrong to let the deceit go on, when, perhaps, he would gain nothing by so doing. Ought he not to own up that he was not Ogden?

"Ahem!"

Paul o' the Piers cleared his throat significantly, hoping to arouse Joyce to his duty, but as that gentleman did not come to time as was desired, his ally himself broke the silence.

"Ogden's got a severe throat influenza, this morning, mister. You will please excuse him ef he don't ante up salubrious. Sometimes he gits a jim-hoodoo impediment therein, an' can't scarcely whisper—I mean whisper."

The old gentleman looked surprised.

"Who is this youth?" he asked.

"I'm Ogden's pard—that is, he's adopted me ez his niece—nephew, I would say."

"I take it you don't know anything about this case?" questioned the old gentleman, with manifest displeasure, but Paul was not to be choked off.

"Oh, but I do; I know a pile."

"Then you may be useful, later, but not now."

This statement was stiffly made, and then the old gentleman turned to Joyce.

"Mr. Ogden," he added, "I suppose, of course, you know my name is Mirabeau. I have called upon you in the belief that you will be willing to explain something of the extraordinary circumstances which have been occupying my attention of late, and which are of such vital importance to me. Am I not right in this?"

"As far as my willingness goes, you certainly are," Joyce replied, guardedly. "I shall be glad to tell all I can."

"But, of course, you know all."

Mirabeau seemed surprised at the answer he had received, and there was a hesitation after his own remark. Then he came to time in eager fashion.

"What became of the public papers left by the Honorable James Seagriff?"

Joyce shifted his position uneasily. He had heard of the Honorable James Seagriff, and so had all men who kept abreast of the times, but the honorable gentleman's papers he knew nothing about. Except that he had been a well-known public character, he had no information as to the party at all.

"I don't know what became of them," he finally replied.

Mirabeau's face fell.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't them."

"To whom did you give them, then?"

"I never had them."

"Impossible!" Mirabeau more emphatically exclaimed.

Paul o' the Piers began to be alarmed. Joyce was feeling his way in the dark, and under such pressure was likely soon to succumb and confess there was no possible way for him to have any information on the subject, because he was not the one who ought to know. Under such danger the crafty youth came to the rescue.

"Why ought we to know?" he asked.

"Because Isaac Ogden was the custodian of Seagrief's papers."

"Where was he livin', then?" asked Paul, shrewdly.

"Ogden? Why, with his relatives, Irad Russell and wife."

"Ah!"

Paul barely avoided making the exclamation so loud that he would attract attention. He believed he was on the trail he sought! He had heard of Irad Russell. He knew a girl named Amy Dunn, and she lived with a man named Russell. If Joyce was not the genuine Ogden, was it not possible to find the genuine, and, by producing him, win the gratitude of Mirabeau so he would do as well by Joyce and Paul as if they could tell all he wished.

"Isaac," Paul coolly exclaimed, addressing Joyce, "ain't it in the scope o' luck that the papers may hev been put in that old barrel? Ef they was, we kin jest about git 'em out an' oblige this gent."

Joyce had no idea what was meant by "the barrel," but he had confidence in his ally, and he somewhat reluctantly made reply:

"It is possible."

"Then why not try it?"

"Very well."

They had arrived at a decision, but not so with Mirabeau. He was glaring wrath.

"Do you mean to say that the papers of the Honorable James Seagrief were dumped away in a barrel like idle trash?" he almost shouted.

"Now hold up, general!" Paul advised. "You don't catch onter all the circumstances o' the case. They was put there as the safest place o' all places, 'cause et was secure, an' in case o' fire could be lugged out quick an' nice. See?"

"No, I don't see," Mirabeau persisted, though his voice had lost much of its sternness. "You may have meant well in pursuing such a course, but let me tell you I think it outrageous. Seagrief was a man of mark, and for his papers to be put in a barrel was simply an outrage. But let it drop. Where is the barrel, now, and where are the papers?"

It was an untimely question. Paul had no idea what he was talking about, and he looked at Joyce for help. But Joyce was looking to Paul to get out of the trouble he had gotten into, and both were silent before the demand for information.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT ISAAC.

"WELL, why don't you answer?"

Mirabeau spoke sharply, and Paul began to see he had walked into difficulty, himself, in his zeal to aid Joyce. He noticed that Mr. Mirabeau had a stern and determined air, and he was very much of the opinion that he was one not to be trifled with. How were they to get clear of trouble.

Fortunately, Paul o' the Piers was a youth not in the habit of losing his nerve in a crisis, and he found a fresh fund of audacity now it was needed.

"Mister, you were wrong in thinkin' Ogden, here, could tell you about this matter. I'm the only cucumber w'ot is able ter do that, fer I'm the only one w'ot hez kept track o' things sense the things was barreled. I kin git the barrel, papers an' all, but I shall hev ter do it on the sly. Jest you let me go an' reconnoiter, an' I'll soon bring you the news you want. See?"

Mirabeau scowled.

"Boy, I doubt you! Your story sounds impossible. Why should a boy know so much?"

"'Cause he's a sharper."

"Just what I think."

Mr. Mirabeau was quite as suspicious as his words indicated, and he turned from Paul to Joyce.

"Explain how you let the papers go into the barrel, Ogden!" he added, commandingly.

The person addressed made a desperate effort to get in line.

"They were left by me at a time I could not attend to them in person," he answered. "The boy knows far more than I. I trust nothing is

wrong, Mr. Mirabeau, for the boy has done his best to guard them."

The scowl which met this explanation was not promising, and Joyce felt a strong desire to confess all, but was troubled with the fear that matters had gone too far for him to retreat.

"Your talk about security is a humbug!" Mirabeau asserted. "You were intrusted with these papers, and now you not only confess that you put them for security in a barrel—think of it!—but that their further care was left to a mere boy. This is outrageous!"

Joyce turned his gaze upon Paul, and the latter saw such evidence of weakening, there, that he hurriedly came to the front again, but with a manner outwardly cool.

"General, ef you let yer bazoo hev a rest an' act like a sensible gent, instead o' howlin' like a dervish with a sore toe, I'll agree ter make a bluff in yer behalf, an' the chances are I'll win the game. How is it? do you act mean, or will you be kinder decent?"

Mirabeau was not inclined to look more favorably on this airy boy, but he was wise enough to suspect that his one chance might be to treat with him.

"What can you do?" he inquired.

"Go an' see about them *pub. docs.* which is short fer public documents."

"Then go at once!" and he pointed toward the door.

Joyce started up quickly: "We'll do it," he declared, decisively.

"No, you won't!" returned Mirabeau, with a cold smile. "You will remain right here with me until I see how well your associate keeps his word. To all intents and purposes you will be my prisoner, though you can fly light and call it by some milder name if you wish. Say, that you are my guest."

His sneer worried Joyce, who found courage for fresh remonstrance.

"Do you remember this is a free country? You say I am your prisoner. I object to such treatment, sir."

"I don't care a rap what you object to; here you stay, just the same."

And there Mr. Mirabeau stuck. His severity and commanding air came to the front more emphatically, and it dawned upon the two allies that he was likely to keep both in captivity unless they yielded to all he ordered. When Joyce had made another and vain effort Paul spoke coolly:

"What do you care where you hang out, Ogden? I kin do the job—why not you stay here calm an' jaunty?"

"So be it."

"I'll go," added Paul, "as soon as I have consulted with Ogden."

"You'll not consult with him!" declared Mirabeau. "I don't trust you; there can be no consultation."

He was fixed in this resolution, and Paul gave way gracefully, though with inward perturbation. He knew Joyce was a veritable prisoner, and though he might do something in his behalf at a pinch, the latter had expressly directed that the police were not to be thought of, and Paul saw how rocky the way was.

All depended upon what he could learn elsewhere, and how much that meant to Joyce was indicated by the imploring and troubled glance of the latter.

Mirabeau was anxious to get Paul away from the house, and the boy did not object. He went, the last thing he saw being Joyce's worried face. As he walked down the street he was filled with wonder.

"I'll be eaten fer a raw turnip—which I ain't—ef it don't beat Robinson Crusoe how I've been beaten around from pillar to post sence I took up with Joyce. Here I be a-gallopin' on, an' I don't know a blessed thing o' what I'm at. Who is Joyce, anyhow, an' what's his secret? What's the secret o' the other huckleberries?"

Occupied with thoughts like these, which he could not answer, he made the most of his time, and soon approached the house where he hoped to find clues.

In one respect he was successful, for he found Amy Dunn cleaning the stoop when he arrived. He greeted her cordially.

"Hullo, my bloomin' daisy! How be you this fine A. M.?"

Amy did not seem much moved by this greeting.

"I'm wal," she admitted.

"Puttin' things in great shape, ain't ye?"

"I'm washin' the steps," was the practical reply.

"Good fer you, my queen! How's Isaac Ogden?"

He had deemed it just as well to put the inter-

rogation in a sudden way, but she received it very calmly.

"He ain't here now."

"Oh! ain't he?" quoth Paul o' the Piers, pleased to find he was on the track. "An' where is the gent anyhow?"

"They say he's gone ter Albany, wherever that is."

"It's a village up nigh West Troy," informed Paul, with dignity. "Why's he gone there an' when did he go?"

"Don't know why, but it was last night. He went away in the night, too, an' it seems very queer to me. Folks don't usually go away in the night, do they, especially after they've been bleedin'?"

"Been what?"

"Bleedin'!"

"Did he do that?"

"Yes; there was blood in his room this mornin'."

Paul rubbed his nose reflectively.

"From what part o' his anatomy did he bleed?"

"I don't know, an' ef he was goin' away so soon I don't see why he wanted to put an extra lock on his door last night, do you?"

The course of Isaac Ogden had never before appeared so odd to Amy as it did now, with Paul's serious face before her. That face somehow quickened her dull perceptions.

"Did he do that?" Paul asked.

"Yes; an' this mornin' he was gone."

"See here, my angel, who is he, anyhow?" and the questioner's voice told of decidedly growing interest. "Who in thunder is Isaac, an' what's all this rumpus about?"

"He lives here with Irad an' his wife, but I don't guess there's much love lost between them. Isaac was afraid o' the Russells, I know, an' mebbe that's why he went away in the night so odd."

Paul brought Amy more to the point, and succeeded in learning that ever since she had been at Russell's, Ogden had lived there, but more than that she was not able to tell him in a satisfactory way. Paul, however, had not forgotten what she said about Ogden putting an extra lock on his door, and when he turned conversation again to that subject he found developments in order.

Amy related all that had happened the previous night; she told of Ogden's fear and the putting on of the bolt; of the cry heard in the night; of the visit of Russell to her room, and of the blood-stains she had found the next morning—after Ogden had gone to Albany—according to Irad's account.

All this came to him without suspicion on Amy's part that she was unfolding so much, but Paul saw more in it.

"Great Caesar's spook!" he ejaculated, "ef Isaac ain't a gone goose the signs are mighty deceptive!"

"What do ye mean?"

"They did him up!"

"Isaac?"

"Nobody else, b'jinks! an' you kin bet he won't come here no more, my treasure! He was in their way, an' that's all. Done up, fer sure!"

The speaker shook his head gloomily.

"Ef he's dead, that's why he wanted ter put the bolt on his door."

"Amy, it's a right speedy brain you hev'; you're onter it like a buzzard onter a catapillar! Yes, fer sure!"

Paul scarcely noticed what he said. It was bad enough to find Isaac missing just when he was most desired, but the possibility that he had stumbled upon a murder was even more impressive. He began to put questions calculated to develop more concerning Ogden, but soon decided th t nothing was to be learned from the simple-minded girl unless by chance. Another idea occurred to him.

"Has Ogden any belongin's?"

"Most o' his things are gone from his room, this mornin', but he's got a desk up in the back room that ain't been touched. I was noticin' the dust on it only a little time ago, an' it come inter my head that he didn't take anything from it when he went off. Still, I know he had things in it he prized highly."

"Say, Amy!" cried Paul, "I must see that desk an' the contents thereof!"

CHAPTER VIII.

GETTING NEAR BED-ROCK.

It had occurred to Paul o' the Piers that the papers which Mirabeau was so anxious to get were in that very desk, and he suddenly became eager to see it. But Amy looked doubtful.

"It won't do fer you to go in now."

"Why not?"

"Irad an' his wife are watchin' all that occurs like two cats. I can't move without their squintin' at me. How would et be ef I let you in?"

"Center shot!" admitted Paul.

"I might do et ef they went away."

"You must do et anyhow, my treasure. Why not ter-night?"

"You can try."

"I will. Great guns an' cat-o'-nine-tails! et must be done. Ef I kin get a look at the thing, I reckon I may succeed in doing something o' value, though w'ot I want ter do," he added, in a lower tone, "is more than I know. That desk I desire an' covet fer ter see, though."

There was no more to be gotten from Amy, so Paul wandered away. He was at a loss what to do next. It was useless to return to Mirabeau with a story of ill-success, so he would have to defer action until he could proceed more to the point.

The latest discoveries were productive of deep thought.

He had found where the much sought Isaac Ogden lived, and though he was not yet certain whether Joyce was the same as Ogden, the way appeared open to learn something of what had become a perplexing and interesting mystery.

If the case of Isaac Ogden was one worthy of attention from such a man as Mirabeau, stern and business-like, the desk might well attract the attention of anybody.

But if Joyce was not Ogden, and Paul believed he really was not, where was that person?

Had he been murdered by Irad Russell and his wife?

"Looks like it, by jinks!" Paul decided. "He was afraid o' them, an' he's gone out o' sight an' left a gory trail behind him. Murder, ef the signs don't miscarry. I ought ter see the police, but ef I do I can't get sight o' that desk. I must postpone the police racket, anyhow. That kin come in later."

He looked anxiously at the sign of a jeweler by the way. It was barely noon, and there was much time to elapse before he could carry out his plan.

Habit led him to the piers, his old resort and, practically, his home. He went to where he had met Joyce. There was no sign of the event of the night, and a dull business was being done there. Those who worked had no knowledge of the fact that men with murderous aims had been there before them, and, as usual in the great city, common traffic went on in the footprints of tragedy.

He sat down to reflect upon the possibilities of the case, and considerable time passed away.

Anon, he was aroused by the sound of footsteps. He looked up and saw Avery, the leader of the original captors of the man Joyce!

He was surprised at the audacity of the fellow in coming near him, but Avery smiled coolly.

"Back to the old resort, eh?" he inquired.

"I ain't nowhere else," Paul serenely agreed.

"Have you tired of your new friend so quickly?"

Paul was about to resent the inference, but he had an inspiration and changed his mind. Assuming a sullen tone, he made reply:

"W'ot of it? You coves in good clothes are all alike, an' you use us poor kids as you see fit. I know you, I do, an' you're no good; that's w'ot you be!"

"So your man has really shaken you?"

"That's my biz!"

"Don't get huffy; there's no need of it. What has happened?"

Paul exhibited a fifty-cent piece he chanced to have in his pocket.

"Say, ain't that royal pay fer savin' a feller from such a cut-throat as you be?"

"You might have known this would be the way," asserted Avery, with an air of satisfaction. "What could you expect from such a person? You threw over your only chance when you took him in preference to me, and now you see the result."

Paul assumed a "tough" air and muttered:

"Oh! come off! All you bloods with cash are alike—you don't care a rap for a feller who has to work fer his daily grub."

This acting was so perfect that Avery was utterly deceived, and he hesitated no longer.

"Boy," he exclaimed, "give me your aid and you shall not want for cash, yourself. You shall be paid well, and have it on the dot. Tell me where Ogden is now?"

"What do I get?"

"This!"

Avery exhibited a roll of bank-notes, and Paul pretended to look at them with avidity.

"Now?"

"Hardly! Give me time to learn whether you are sincere. After your own experience you must understand that it isn't safe to trust any one. Still, you are just as safe as if you had the cash, for I never break my word. It's all right."

If Paul had been as bound up in dollars and cents as he pretended, he would not have regarded this argument as convincing, but he did not want to be too exacting when he was himself bent on fooling somebody.

"You talk square," he sulkily responded, "an' ef you are inclined ter do the right thing you'll find me ready ter help you out. I can't tell ye jest where Ogden is, fer they shook me too soon fer me ter git onter that, but I kin git near enough to it so I reckon it'll all be right."

"Proceed!"

Paul had no explanation at hand, but he made a desperate effort to find one.

"All I know is that the gal—Alice, do they call her?—told the cabman he was ter take some things from Number — West street, at nine o'clock, ter-night, ter where they took Ogden. By hoverin' nigh that place an' follerin' the vehicle, I reckon the retreat o' the gang may be found. Course it kin, fer that matter."

Avery was disappointed. He had hoped for more decisive and quicker work, and for something which would put him at once in touch with the winning cards of the case, but he was philosophic enough not to despise small winnings.

"You are sincere in this?" he demanded.

"Sure!"

"Then be here to-night, at an hour before the time named, and I'll put you in the way of getting money in your pocket. If you have told me right, I'll do handsomely by you."

"Good! I love a cheerful giver!" declared Paul, never relaxing the seriousness of his face.

Avery had more questions to ask, and this he proceeded to do, but Paul was too wise to know much, and the cross-examination availed nothing. No more of importance was said.

They separated with the understanding that they were to meet on the pier at eight o'clock, and Avery went his way. If he expected Paul to settle down to the prosaic occupation of watching the life-scenes of the vicinity he was very much mistaken.

"General, I'm with you!" the lad muttered, grimly, as Avery receded.

Only waiting to have the movement safe he left his position and followed quietly and secretly where the man went. For one of his usual shrewdness Avery did not show due care. He may have been in deep thought, but certain it is that he walked away without once looking around to see if he was pursued, and, as a result, Paul's task was by no means hard.

It was not a long chase.

Avery finally brought up at a house of ancient type and by no means unprepossessing exterior, and there he disappeared. Paul began to reconnoiter, but was interrupted as his quarry emerged again. Seeing he was going away the pursuer became in doubt as to his best course to follow, but was helped out by a slight circumstance.

"Goin' in a cab!" was the comment. "Wal, I can't hire no cab, an' I'll hev to let him slide. I ain't in trainin' ter race ro hoss."

So Paul watched Avery depart, when he settled down to the situation. It had occurred to him at the start that perhaps the greatest good might be done right in, or near, the house where Avery had called, and this impression was confirmed as he saw two men had come out and were watching him go.

"They are chinnin' about something. Wonder ef I kin learn what?"

Paul conceived the idea with his usual quickness, and it seemed timely. The manner of the men—the intentness with which they gazed after the late caller, and the air which accompanied it—all went to arouse the notion he had gained, and he set out to confirm his suspicion at once.

The nature of their surroundings was in his favor, and he sauntered forward with the most careless show imaginable.

He safely secured the coveted position.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RIVER THIEVES.

THE men were talking busily as Paul arrived within hearing.

"Yes, old Avery is a schemer from 'way back," one of the twain remarked. "You see, Isaac Ogden became the holder of the papers of some dead politician—Seagrief, I think his name was—and though it was never expected he would

be called upon to produce them, or that they would become valuable, they did assume just that aspect in events. It is a race now to see who will have them."

"With the odds in Avery's favor."

"I don't know about it."

"What's against him?"

"The worst thing is that he don't know where the papers are. You see, Ogden has only just been located, and there is a rush for him and his aid. All well and good, but, in the meanwhile, where are the papers? They don't know."

"This Alice What's-her-name is a relative of the dead politician, isn't she?"

"So I understand it."

"And Avery is helping her?"

The previous speaker laid his finger alongside his nose.

"So he claims."

"But you don't believe it?"

"I think Avery is making a fool of the girl—in fact, I am sure of it. She has some sentimental grounds for doing as she does—it's somebody's honor, or some such trash; but Avery is on the make, and he, knowing the papers have financial value to certain parties, is going to use her as a cat's-paw."

"Great scheme!"

Both men laughed, but Paul Peters scowled his disapproval.

"Ef anybody is makin' such a bid," thought the pier shadow, "he's simply an atrocious villain, an' he kin count on meter trip him up—though these gents must be mixed. Avery ain't makin' no cat's-paw, fer he ain't in with Alice. Kin it be that Mirabeau is the gent in the Judas biz?"

"Seagrief," went on the chief speaker of the twain, "was a man o' great light and importance, as you may remember. All politicians have enemies and hold secrets. Right there is the secret of this crusade. Dead though he is, his work goes on."

"What's this mention of somebody named Joyce?" continued the questioner.

"He was a servant for Isaac Ogden, as I understand it. He can tell more about the matter than any one save Ogden, but it is not known where this Joyce is."

The boy of the piers barely repressed a chuckle. He was advancing in the case, if others were not. He could understand that Joyce had been mistaken for Ogden, not because of any facial resemblance, but because the two had been associated at one time, and probably those who now claimed Joyce as the original Ogden had not known the appearance of either.

Why Joyce did not own his identity and get rid of all danger was not to be explained, but he undoubtedly had a reason.

"The strings begin ter unite," thought the shadow. "Paul, you may yet be in it!"

"I'll bet Avery finds Joyce," declared the second stranger.

"He may."

"He's a corker when he sets out to do a thing, and don't you forget it. Yes, he'll find him."

"They happened on Ogden by luck. They didn't any of them know where he was putting up, but Avery ran on him down near the piers. Ogden was hurt in the fight which followed and Avery was nearly beaten out by a boy who put in his oar at the wrong time—a meddlesome street Arab, with gall like a mountain!"

Paul winked gravely at vacancy.

"Where's the kid now?"

"Very likely he's strangled."

"So's yer grandmother!" muttered the listener.

"Mirabeau and his gang showed up at the wrong moment and rescued Ogden from Avery, but Ave will snap him again, you bet!"

"A ginger snap!" thought Paul, derisively.

He had heard about all the two men had to say, and as conversation slackened he moved away without having been suspected or noticed in more than a casual way.

Several hours remained before him, and he was not certain how he could best put them in. It would be a good thing for Joyce if he could return and assure Mirabeau that all was ready for him to seize the secret he aspired to gain, but as no such assurance was to be given at present, would it not be as well to keep away and see what would come of the interview with Avery?

As he had been talking for effect when he told the latter about the house on West street he could not keep the promise held out, or further bid for that person's favor, but he hoped something might cause Avery to trust in him, in a measure.

Before the appointed time he was on the pier.

where he then sat down to await Avery's coming.

At that season of the year darkness fell early, and he was not noticeable as he sat on the edge of the pier and watched the panorama of the great stream. It was a sight which never palled on his eyes, and worthy of close attention from any one, so he gave it scrutiny more marked than was to be expected under the circumstances—he never grew nervous.

"A boat!"

Muttering thus, he finally aroused and looked toward the water-end of the pier.

"Comin' in, too."

It was coming, and in a peculiarly slow and sinuous way. This, and the stealthy touch of the oars, served to awaken his suspicions at the start.

"Mischief up, fer sure! What is it? River thieves, or some other kind o' vermin?" decided the young Pier Patrol.

Zigzagging down the dock the boat neared him. He extended his slight figure on the pier, and looked down, as they cut the water so slyly. Two men comprised the crew.

Almost under his point of refuge they paused.

"As well here as anywhere," commented one, in a low voice.

"Let her go!"

A rope was thrown up and made fast. Then both clambered to the pier. Before they had landed Paul was far enough away, so that discovery was out of the question, and he could observe them to his heart's desire.

No further talk passed between them. They looked back at the boat as if somewhat worried about it, but did not let that interfere with their plans.

Silently they walked toward the street and soon disappeared from sight.

"Wal, here's a go!" murmured Paul. "Ef I had the time I'd jest look inter this. Ez I size them up they're nothin' less than cut-throats, but there ain't no proof o' that. Et's fer the police ter prove, an' not fer me."

It was a natural decision, since he was expecting Avery, but as he remembered some time was yet to elapse before he was to see that man, fresh curiosity seized upon him.

"Wonder what's in that boat?" he muttered, and the more he thought on the subject, the more eager he became to learn for himself.

It appeared but the work of a moment, and he decided to look. Rising, he went to the edge of the pier and silently lowered himself to the boat. No great thing was there, certainly, for he could see only a pile of old garments, but these he pushed aside in the hope that they might conceal something of more importance.

"Dead frost!"

With an exclamation of disgust he turned away. The craft furnished nothing to interest him. He put out his hand to ascend to the pier, but stopped short.

Footsteps sounded above, and two men appeared at the edge.

Paul dropped to the bottom of the boat. Whoever was there would see him if he remained where he was, while if it was not the returning owners, he might escape notice.

The last chance died away as they began to clamber down, and he saw he had got there at just the wrong moment. It was, indeed, the owners of the boat.

To pull a coat over his form and then lay quiet, was now his only refuge.

"No go, ter-night!" grumbled one of the men, as he dropped upon one of the oar-seats.

"Stick to it!" retorted the other, complainingly. "You won't yield, an' that's the end of it. We'll go back like two chumps, when we might as well have a rich haul."

"Ourselves, fer instance, with the cops as the haulers."

"Bah! you're too cautious!"

"I'm no chump."

"Have it as you will."

Up to this time the last speaker seemed to have an idea he might change the mind of his companion, but he abandoned the hope now, and followed the example of his companion by taking an oar.

They prepared to go, and Paul was still under the pile of old garments.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL THE SPY.

THE shadower of the piers was not troubled by his situation. When the two night-skulkers came back so unexpectedly he was in a measure taken unawares, and his one chance to escape was by leaping into the water. He would have

done this without a thought of the wetting, or possible danger, but he had delayed out of curiosity.

Now, this curiosity bade fair to make trouble for him.

The position of the men was such that he could not make a dive overboard without danger of being seized or caught in the water.

But this did not worry him. Coolly accepting the situation—he for the time forgot that he was going away from the place where he was to meet Avery—he determined to listen for awhile before making the dash for liberty.

There was nothing to be heard, however.

The men had quarreled over some minor point, and in a sulky mood they left the dock. Oars were dipped, and the boat receded from the pier. They worked with the caution of those accustomed to do all things on the sly, and scarcely a ripple disturbed the water as the craft went its way.

"Mebbe it's a new Captain Kidd!" thought Paul, with his usual levity. "Off ter the pirate islands we do go!"

They reached the open river, when the men put more muscle into their work and the trip began in earnest. Paul bared one part of his head and tried to see where they were bound. The course was diagonally across the stream, with the lower Jersey shore as the seeming objective point.

The passenger saw nothing to prevent himself from taking a free ride, and so held to his place. Finally the sulky mood of the twain began to abate.

"What ef any o' them snoozers see us go away?" asked the timid boatman. "They would blow on us in a minute."

"Ef they see us they will be layin' fer us when we come back, an' ef there is any sech sign the blamed critters shall die!" declared the second man, with cool and ominous resolution.

"Is it necessary?"

"Ain't it our motter ter kill any bloke who may make trouble fer us?"

"Yes, an' I'm with ye ef you say it's necessary."

"It is, ef we hev been seen."

Paul heard and grimaced.

"Pretty company I've got inter!" he thought.

"They kill men without a mutter, ef they've been seen. Nice chums fer an orphan boy, b'jinks!"

There was something of seriousness in this comment, for he was not placed so he could safely leave his hiding-place until the other shore was reached and the men saw fit to vacate the craft, but he was as cool as ever.

Yet, the fact remained that he might have serious trouble out of the meeting with these same wanderers of the night.

As they approached the Jersey shore they exercised fresh care, and rowed into a dock with slow and cautious strokes. It was an old and tumble-down place, and it was not strange that they were not challenged. Indeed, it appeared that trade had so long deserted the spot that river-rats, human and otherwise, had it all to themselves. Paul could see decay everywhere, in the unequal lines of the pier.

The boat was made fast, and then they clambered to the surface above. The boy was left the only occupant of the craft.

The chance was open for him to leave by taking to the water, but this he did not care to do.

"I ain't goin' ter get my buckskins wet fer nothin', ef I kin help it," he decided.

Voices sounded on the pier, and he crawled up so he could see what was going on. The original two men had been joined by another. The latter was speaking.

"I don't see why you should leave here when I have hired you to attend to my affairs!" he growled.

"I reckon we ain't obliged ter set around an' suck our claws all the time, jest ter take care of a man who's got a knife-wound in his gizzard," retorted the leader of the pair. "D'ye think he'll run away?"

"He may be stronger than he looks."

"Then, again, he may not."

"Well, we won't quarrel over it. Perhaps it's all right. How is your charge?"

"Bad as ever."

"He hasn't told his name?"

"No, nor he ain't likely to until he gets some life inter him. He won't tell who he is till he gits his thinkers back."

"Odd!" was the musing comment. "Here I've picked him up, and hoped to get something good out of it, but it's all smoke so far. He may be a millionaire, or he may be a beggar, if he does wear good clothes."

"Bet you that ye don't never realize ten cents out o' him."

"I'm not likely to if he dies without telling who he is. I almost wish I'd turned him over to the police without trying to make a raise on him in this way. Well, let's go in and see the fellow."

"Come on!"

The boatmen led off and the third man came after. Paul saw their course was toward a shanty which stood on the edge of the pier—a most miserable and tumble-down structure—and as it was out of the line of observation he had had the chance to get out of sight at once.

"Shall I, or sha'n't I?"

Paul's inquisitive spirit was at the front. He always had felt an interest in things which happened around the metropolis, and, being aware that many of the happenings were contrary to law, he had struck matters which he had told to the police with advantage to them and himself.

"Et's too late ter keep the appointment with Avery on the dot," he soliloquized. "Et won't take but a minute ter look inter this case, an' it may be a good thing."

He went on to the door of the shanty. It was closed, but was such a frail obstacle that he did not find it any great impediment. He pushed it back.

The interior was divided into two parts. The first contained nothing of interest, and would have been dark but for the light which came through faintly from the inner half. This just showed the connecting door, and as none of the men were in the way he determined to have a view of the other half.

Quietly he stole across the floor. One motion put the door ajar, and the desired view was his.

He saw a most miserable place, yet one doubtless the home of the boatmen. The unfinished walls were hung with all kinds of clothing and odd articles, as well as with a multitude of different articles of varied use, and the floor was littered with the same things over again. If there was a variety in one way, there was none in value—nothing looked to be of actual value, unless it were the oars and other articles peculiar to the life of water-faring men.

As a whole it was a good model of an old curiosity shop.

All the men were present, and all were congregated around something which was in one corner.

The dim light was not favorable for the survey Paul would have liked, but it sufficed to show still another person. The latter was stretched out on a couch of rags, and presented a most doleful appearance. He was pale-faced, and, under the circumstances, with such faint light, uncanny-looking.

It needed no explanation to show that he was the individual of whom the last of the trio had spoken.

He lay with closed eyes, and even when one of them bent forward and touched him he did not stir or show any evidence that he knew of their presence.

"You see how it is, Martin," said the boatman, addressing the man who had hired him.

"He does seem the same."

"He'll die!"

"Think so?"

"Yes."

Martin bent and felt of the injured man's pulse.

"Bad!" he admitted.

"Better hand him over. You can't make any raise out o' him, an' the police may find his folks an' they give you ten cents, or more."

"Don't wax sarcastic. The man is not yet dead, and I have some hope left. Ben, this ain't any of your work, is it? He was struck down by a secret foe—a job peculiarly like those you do. Mournful end to a life of strength, and, perhaps, gayety. Struck down by an assassin hand! Hard luck!"

"You're a pretty pill to sentimentalize!" growled Ben. "You wouldn't object ter cut anybody's throat ef you could get a dollar out of it. Oh, I know you! No, I didn't hit him, nor none o' my friends didn't. Don't be too funny! Do ez you please about the chap—I don't care a rap."

"I think I'll stick ter him fer the present."

Martin made a further examination, trying to learn just what the injured man's physical condition was, and he was thus occupied when Paul was startled by the sound of footsteps behind him.

Some one had entered the shanty by the main door!

The river haunter intruder did not fail to see what this meant to him. He was cut off from retreat, and subject to discovery and any other mishap which the incident might bring about. The new-comer might prove to be a prowler who would be only too glad to get out of his dilemma when he saw others were there, but it was far more likely that it was some ally of Ben or Martin.

Paul took quick thought and acted accordingly.

Only one way of action was open to him, and this would doubtless prove to be anything but what he desired—a way of safety. There was no time to weigh the evidence with care, and he stole forward like a cat and gained the very presence of the trio.

Not yet had they heard anything to draw their attention, and before they did he had crept behind a barrel.

He was none too soon. The standing of the latest comer was shown as he advanced boldly to the inner room and pushed the door open.

"Hallo, Ben!" he exclaimed.

There was a general start, but both Ben and his original companion grew at ease when they saw who it was.

"Hallo, Mike!" Ben answered.

"I've come around fer you ter go into a job with me. It's only to nab the papers of a dead politician, an' ef we make a success we shall get some boodle—"

Ben had been trying to stop the speaker, and he succeeded at last. He regarded Martin suspiciously.

"Who've you got here?" he snapped.

"A safe gent."

"Yes," Martin agreed, "and if you're much worried I'll say your words were all Choctaw to me."

So they had been, but to Paul o' the Piers they had had a far more vivid meaning.

CHAPTER XI.

A TIME OF PERIL.

MIKE was a hail-fellow-well-met, as was soon proved. He was duly introduced to Martin, and though the secret he had almost imparted was not again mentioned, all became good humor and good will between the quartette.

Beer was brought out, and all partook.

The only one who objected to the situation was Paul o' the Piers. They had sat down in just the worst way imaginable for him, and as a result, he could not leave his hiding-place without being seen. Practically, he was a prisoner.

Mike seemed to think Martin had been well enough recommended to make confidence safe, and he finally abruptly resumed the topic he had begun before.

"I've got a job planned out which I want you to go into with me, Ben," he explained. "Did you ever hear of Seagrief, the dead politician—that is, did you know of him when he's alive?"

"I b'lieve so."

"His biz is bein' looked inter."

"Why?"

"Ez I hear it, he had the secrets of a good many other public men, an' most o' them in black an' white. One o' them is up fer office, an' it is known his record is away below par. Ef the truth was known o' him he never could be elected, fer his work in the past has been mighty queer in some ways. Seagrief held the proofs o' this fact, an' left all in paper form when he died. Now, there's a hustle ter find out where his papers are, an' nobody knows. Both sides in this present election wants them, you see, an' there's a boodle for whoever kin deliver the goods."

"Ter the highest bidder?"

"Of course."

"Quite a plant."

"Et means cash, an' that's what is the main thing."

"Do you know where they be?"

"I do; they're with a family named Russell, an' it won't be no great job ter get them. What say, shall we go in?"

Ben hesitated. He was ready for any scheme which promised money, but this was out of his usual line of business.

"Who would pay us?" he asked. "Have you seen any of the leaders of the parties?"

"I haven't, but you know how it is in a political campaign—each man is ready ter cut the throat of his opponent. Then there is a gal—Alice Somebody—who is a near relative o' Seagrief, an' she wants the papers so she can destroy them. She thinks her relative may himself be put in a hole, an' his memory disgraced, ef they are made public."

The piers shadower was getting news, and he

at once decided which side he was on. He was with Alice, first, last, and all the time, for she was the only one he had seen who fully commanded his respect.

Ben looked thoughtful.

"Wouldn't she pay more than the others?"

"Mebbe, but she won't! I hate her, an' she don't benefit by them dockyments—not ef I hev a thing ter do with them. I hev a grudge ag'in' her, by thunder!"

"Say, she ain't the one who had you sent up fer stealin', is she?" bluntly demanded Ben.

"She's that very one, is Alice Vanner, durn her! Mebbe you see now why I hev an interest in the case? Money is good, but revenge goes further. I'll git square with her ef it takes my life ter pay fer it!" and Mike smote his knee heavily with his big fist.

"Go in!"

It was a nonchalant answer, and Ben did not seem greatly interested, himself. It was not his quarrel. But Mike was in it with zeal, and he proceeded to talk further, and with volubility. What he said amounted to nothing except to show how bitter was his grudge, and the others did not care for that one way or the other. In a general way they sympathized with him, but the prevailing idea was that he must fight out his own battles.

He finally asked Ben for a decisive reply, but the latter was still hesitating when Paul heard sounds from the outer room which indicated a fresh arrival. The others heard nothing.

It so happened that trivial matters were for the time spoken of, and if, as seemed probable, anybody had paused to listen, there was nothing of importance to be heard.

Again the connecting door moved—it swung back.

All looked up in wonder, and none were so much amazed as Paul o' the Piers.

Alice Vanner stood in the doorway!

"Great guns!"

Paul breathed, rather than spoke the words, and then he could say no more. Surprise made him utterly speechless. What unlucky chance had brought the girl into the company of her most merciless foe—of Mike, the man she had somehow sent to prison.

She was not alone. A stout individual, who had the distinguishing traits of a household servant, was by her side, but when he was considered as a protector, it was to be seen how inadequate the means were under existing conditions.

She had come among wolves, and poorly guarded.

Mike was at first supremely astonished; then he flushed with triumph at seeing his foe within his grasp, as it were. He was one of the most remote from the door, and as he saw he was not observed he shrunk back and awaited the outcome of the matter.

Alice looked at those nearest her.

"I wish to find a man named Ben Magree," she announced.

"I'm him," replied Benjamin.

"You are the man who lives here?"

"I be."

"Doubtless you are the same I seek. I have been referred to you for help, and hope you will be able to give it."

"I'll try, mum."

Ben did not know he had to deal with Mike's enemy, and, as he saw no way of making money further than to oblige her, he was duly civil and anxious to do so.

"Do you know a Mr. Martin?"

The gentleman who bore the name began to take fresh interest. He seemed to be in the game himself, and with the instinct of one addicted to crime he would have asked cautious work on Ben's part, but the latter blurted out the truth:

"Here he is!"

He indicated Martin, and Alice's face lighted up with hope. She had worn a doubtful expression from the first, while her companion was even more worried. He continued in that vein, but she forgot fear in the pleasure of the discovery.

"John Martin?" she questioned.

"That's him."

With this certificate from Ben, she went on quickly:

"Do you know a certain Isaac Ogden?"

The light did not show Martin's face clearly, but his reply was prompt:

"No."

"What about a pair of gold-bowed eye-glasses you lately pawned at Jacob Felsky's, in the Bowery?"

Martin had an idea that his hair was trying to stand on end. He had pawned the glasses, and

they had come from the pocket of the man who was at that moment lying unconscious on the couch behind him. It had been the only article of value on the stranger's person, and as he was hard up, financially, he had ventured to use this means of replenishing his own funds.

Now, it looked as if he might come to grief through it.

Obeying his first impulse he stubbornly returned:

"I ain't pawned no sech thing."

"Glasses belonging to Isaac Ogden have been thus pawned."

"Can't help it—I didn't do it."

Martin was firm, while Paul o' the Piers agitated his brain in vain to seize the connection.

"Don't you know Ogden? Come, my man," and Alice grew persuasive, "if you do have any information, this is your chance of all chances to help yourself to cash. It is not a menace to your liberty or safety, if you found the glasses by any means not strictly honest, for the article named does not figure at all. What I want is to locate Isaac Ogden."

Martin glanced slyly behind him.

It was a slight motion, but, taken with other things, it was enough to give Paul o' the Piers an idea.

Was Isaac Ogden even then before them in the person of the unconscious man?

"Miss, I ain't done harm ter Ogden," declared Martin, "and I don't know as I ever saw him. Still, I may hev met him somewhere, an' got the things you name, in trade an' barter. Ef I kin find Isaac, what is it worth?"

"Fifty dollars!"

"Two hundred will fetch him, miss."

"I have named a good price and can consider nothing more."

Martin noticed the tone in which she spoke and drew his conclusions. He asked when and how he was to be paid, and, after some verbal fencing, a decision was reached which satisfied him.

"So be it, miss. Wal, if you want the man who had the specs, there he is!"

Moving slightly, he revealed the unconscious member of the party.

Until then Alice had not noticed the couch, much less the person thereon, and it was a surprise to her. She looked in wonder. The dim light flickered on her and the others, making a weird and fitful picture. Thus far she had not given any attention to Mike, but Paul o' the Piers had. He observed the triumphant, gloating expression on the revengeful fellow's face, and foresaw trouble of the worst kind.

Far better would it have been for the adventuresome girl if she was a long ways from Ben's shanty.

She turned again to Martin.

"Are you sure this is Ogden?" she asked.

"It's the chap who had the eye-glasses, an' I suppose it's him, too. Don't you know?"

"His personal appearance is not known to me. I thought it was, and this error has once gotten me into trouble. This time I must be sure. Waken the man and let him speak for himself."

Martin moved uneasily.

"Sorry, but he's sick, an' not in condition to move. He's got a fever, or some other pestiferous disease, an' he is unconscious. See?"

"This is no place for a sick person. He must be removed at once to a suitable place, and a good doctor summoned."

"Anything you say, ef you hand over the cash. Move him ef you wish; I don't object."

"But I do!"

And Mike stepped into view.

CHAPTER XII.

PAUL FACES THE CROWD.

THE crisis was at hand.

Paul o' the Piers knew it would be impossible to make terms with the revengeful ex-convict. All this was told in his brutal face, which bore an expression which spoke for itself. The chance had come for him to be revenged, and he was not going to miss it.

Dim as the light was Alice was not slow to recognize him, and the retreat of color from her cheeks was proof of the fact that she realized how serious the occasion was.

The scene was impressive in the extreme. Alice and Mike stood nearest the light, where the shadows fell the least, while all the others were in the background except Paul, who peered around the barrel in his anxiety to overhear and see all.

"Yes," added Mike, "I do object! I object, an' you know me. You hev seen me before, I reckon! Ay, an' I've seen you! I see you ter my sorer in the past, but it's my turn now. Yes, I object!"

He delighted to dwell upon the expression, and the color did not come back to Alice's cheeks. She realized that in all probability he was a friend of the gang there assembled, and what he was to her she knew only too well.

Rallying, she turned to Martin.

"My business is with you," she said, as firmly as possible.

"Mine is with you!" retorted Mike. "Don't you think you kin git out o' this, fer you can't. You're in fer it, an' don't you forget it. You an' me hev met before, an' you remember what it meant ter me. You remember, too, that I told you then I'd be revenged fer what happened ter me. Well, the time has come, an' don't you forget it!"

Again Alice determinedly ignored him.

"Mr. Martin, shall we continue our business?" she asked.

There was no reply.

"Friends don't go back on each other," added Mike, "an' I know I kin depend on all here."

So thought Paul. Strangers the gang might be to each other, but there was the freemasonry of crime between them, and they would undoubtedly hang together and go against the girl.

"She's goin' ter get inter the biggest kind of a row!" he thought.

Alice's escort was very much alarmed. He was a man of moderately good courage, but he had not bargained on meeting enemies by the wholesale when he agreed to help Alice in her work. As for the girl, she still showed unexpected courage, but the worst facts were being impressed upon her mind.

"Mr. Martin," she resumed, "if you will have this man conveyed at once to the nearest good hotel I will give you one hundred dollars."

"Do you happen to have that sum about you?" and his eyes twinkled avariciously.

"I am not such a fool as that, but I can get it for you in a very short time. It shall be done, too. Will you do what I ask?"

There was a manifest wavering, but Mike soon put a stop to it.

"No, he won't do it!" the rough declared. "This ranch is owned by Ben and Terence, an' they won't go back on me. How is it, pard, does my word go or not?"

"Et goes," Ben agreed. "Ef you want the gal, take her!"

"I'll do it!"

Mike suddenly advanced upon Alice. Both she and her servant were armed, and her own revolver came out quickly. The servant was too much alarmed, however, and could only stare and shake. The force against them was certainly too much for one person to resist with hope of success.

In contrast to his failure Alice's own courage shone out brilliantly as she presented the revolver.

"Stop!" she commanded. "I will not submit to injustice from you. I know your nature and your malignant hatred. Knowing these, I also know how to deal with you. Convict, proved guilty by many witnesses, you are not one to inspire any more of respect than fear. Keep your distance, or take the consequences!"

There was something in her manner which held Mike speechless while she said her say in full. For the time he was awed, but his nature soon asserted itself.

"You talk it well," he grated, "but it won't work. I ain't no clam ter be bullied by you, an' I won't let the advantage slip while I have it. You belong ter me, an' I'll keep you!"

"Keep me?"

"Yes, you go with me!"

"Where?"

"Where I see fit ter take you. You are my prisoner, an' hev no vote in the case. I'll find a place ter keep ye, never fear."

The evil gleam in his eyes struck terror to Alice's heart, but she tried not to show it. She dared not show it. To her it seemed the one hope was to keep up a bold demeanor and face the danger resolutely while one chance remained.

"You talk absurdly—"

"Do I? I'll show you! I'll—"

Again he started toward her, but the revolver brought him to a halt.

"Attempt to touch me and you die!" she declared, in a clear voice.

Mike was nonplused. She was only a woman, but it was an unpleasant fact that a revolver evened up all other things, if it was held in a true hand and firm grasp. He saw she did not waver, and drew the inference.

"Say, you fellers," he finally growled, "give me a lift."

"Go in!" suggested Martin, with a grin. "Don't be afraid of a woman, my bold soldier."

"I ain't afeered, but—"

He did not think of a good way in which to finish the sentence, and a derisive laugh came from the other men.

"She's too much for you," ventured Martin.

Alice saw this banter was driving Mike to desperation, and she could not but see what would be the result if the game was long kept up.

"Men," she added, "will you not aid me in this? Surely, you will not stand there and see this big brute work his will. Help me, and let me go away."

"No!" declared Ben. "Et's Mike's lay-out, an' nobody shall put in his oar. Wind it up, Mike!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Mike made a desperate effort to obey the order. He gave one forward leap, and his hand touched Alice's arm. As this was done the weapon therein was discharged, but the bullet went wild. Missing his head by the fraction of an inch, it buried itself in the wall and the agony was over.

Alice struggled vainly in his grasp.

"Help!" she implored, looking for her servant.

She appealed in vain; the man was in swift retreat, and fast leaving the shanty.

"I have you!" cried Mike; "I have you, my beauty!"

"So has yer grandmother!"

The words were shouted in his ear, and at the same time a foot was skillfully twisted around his own. It was the lock of a scientific wrestler, and it had due effect. Mike, taken off his guard, tumbled to the floor ingloriously, while a hand clutched Alice's arm.

"Skip!" called out the same voice. "Git a move on, an' let it be the liveliest kind, too. Run, or you're a gone goose!"

It was not a very elegant way to address a young lady, but the address came from Paul o' the Piers, and he was more noted for coming to the point than for elegance of diction.

At the crisis he had leaped from his covert, and his timely interference had given Alice her one chance.

Fortunately, he had not to deal with a stupid person, and she acted promptly on the suggestion given. The way to safety was clear, if not assured, and she turned and fled.

"Whoop her up, Eliza Jane!"

Such was the unique farewell Paul gave the gang, and then he went where Alice had led. But he was not given the start which meant sure escape. Long experience had rendered the gang quick-witted, and as one man they sprung up to follow.

"A spy!"

"Run him down!"

"Shoot him!"

"He can't leave by the pier!"

These and other shouts Paul heard as he went. All but one had no effect. The assertion that he could not go by the pier somehow found weight in his mind. It might mean something or nothing, but he was of the opinion it was the former, and as he remembered the row-boat which had been left by the pier, he formed a plan of action in a twinkling.

With a few long steps he reached the side of the flying girl.

"This way!" ordered the boy. "Foller me, and I'll see you safely through the pinch. Don't lose an atom o' time, or you're a goner!"

Alice had not failed to observe who came to her help in the shanty, and when the same person reappeared she was not slow to obey his call. Had she known the plan she might not have been so ready, for when the direction took them toward the water she hesitated.

"Come on!" Paul urged.

"How can we go—"

"By boat. Look back!—it's the only way."

She did look back, and what she saw was enough to stop the hesitation. The enemy were pouring out of the shanty, and it would be folly to try and go down the pier in retreat.

"Down, down!" ordered the rescuer.

She waited no longer. She was wholly unaccustomed to the water, but the boat was promising, and she accepted Paul's aid most willingly. Both went down hurriedly.

This was scarcely done, however, when the pursuers appeared at the head of the pier.

"Hold up!" shouted Mike. "Ef you don't surrender I'll blow you out o' the water!"

The threat did not alarm Paul. He had seized the oars, and with full force he plunged them into the briny wave. The craft was heavy and sluggish, making a rapid start out of the ques-

tion, but the young oarsman did not lose heart or fall off in his endeavors. Throwing all his strength into the effort he essayed to get out of the dock before harm could be done his charge, and that the will of the enemy was good to do such harm was plain from the manner of Alice's leading foe.

"I have the bead on you!" added Mike. "Hold up, or I'll shoot!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RACE ON THE RIVER.

"HADN'T you better stop?" asked Alice, nervously.

"Stop?" repeated Paul. "Why should I do that?"

"I don't want you to be slain for me."

"B'jinks! I'll rescue you or go down in the wreck!"

Paul o' the Piers uttered the words through his clinched teeth, and all the while he pulled the harder. He was not made of weak stuff, and did not intend to yield while one hope remained.

Mike was still to be seen on the pier, and his every way indicated he intended to carry out his threat and fire, but the shot did not come, and boat was fast leaving the dock.

A little further and the darkness would make the firing uncertain and unreliable.

"They are gone!" suddenly announced Alice.

Paul looked back and saw there was, indeed, no one visible on the pier. The foe had abruptly and mysteriously disappeared.

"Some new scheme!" muttered Paul. "What is it? Is there another boat, or—"

He soon had his answer. His sharp eyes detected the outlines of another craft. It was coming out of the adjoining dock, and its direction was toward them. He had his answer.

Alice looked out on the dark river.

"It is very rough!" she murmured.

"It'll be rougher, soon," Paul grimly replied.

He realized that it was to be a race, with the odds against him. He was of old experience in water-life, and could pull a good car or swim with the best, but the craft he now had was not suited to navigation by one person. Well did he know he could not outrow the enemy if it came to a test of speed, and that was what seemed on the books.

"Can I help?" asked Alice, anxiously.

"Not now. Keep cool, an' be ready fer the pinch, ef it comes. Ef you've got that revolver, hang onter it—you may need it, later!"

Saying no more he bent to his work with vim, and the boat moved much faster than was to be expected. Still, he could not hope to gain, and he saw the other craft coming on with alarming speed.

"Hold up, there!" ordered Mike. "You are helpless, an' you may ez wal save yerself from the wreck while you kin."

"I'll die first!" breathed Alice.

"Ditto me, but I can't talk."

Paul tried no more, but gave his every endeavor to the flight. The city of New York was to him the fairest place on earth, but never before had the lights of the metropolis looked so alluring and desirable.

If he could only reach the other side of the stream!

Having once settled down to business he gave no further attention to the river than was necessary to keep his direction. If he had given this attention he would have noticed a steamer moving toward them in the slow and majestic style of its kind, and have thought that it might yet figure in the case.

All of the boy's sympathies were enlisted in behalf of Alice, and as the other boat began to cut down the intervening distance he felt his own weakness keenly. Oh! for another pair of arms to urge on the craft—no one pair could handle it properly.

A mocking laugh came from the pursuers.

Anger began to give place to contempt with them as they noticed how they were gaining, and Mike called out mockingly:

"Fifty dollars on the kid! Who takes anybody else fer a winner?"

"Ain't he a daisy at the biz!" added another voice.

"He ought ter row on the Atalantas."

"How pretty he 'feathers!'"

"O'Connor and Hanlan wouldn't be in it!"

It was amusement for them, and it did Paul no harm. He was not disturbed in the least, but with a strong and skillful stroke he proceeded to get all out of the boat that he could. Inch by inch the foe gained, however, and as the last hopes faded away Paul began to consider schemes other than rowing for victory.

"Kin you swim?" he asked.

"A little," Alice replied.

"Ez a last resort we'll jump overboard. B'jinks! we won't give 'em no easy victory."

"I am with you—let us fight to the bitter end!"

Paul felt proud of his ally at that moment, but it was no time to express any such feeling; he had more work to do. All his attention was on the other boat, and when, suddenly, his own began to rock strangely he looked around with a start.

What he saw was alarming.

Looming above him was the black hulk of a steamer, and already its motion was rocking the frail boat. The veriest novice would have seen that a collision was imminent, if not unavoidable, but Paul saw more. Nothing but a miracle could save them from being run down by the steamer—his own efforts would avail nothing in an attempt to get out of the way.

Instinctively he sprung to his feet and shouted. There was a slight stir on the deck, but not in time.

More pronounced became the rocking, and then, before the bow of the larger craft could touch them the swell had caught and nearly overturned its diminutive opponent. One moment the latter's bow was pitched in air; then Alice and Paul were flung out and into the water.

Cool as ever in the crisis, Paul caught his companion as they went, determined they should share the peril as they had the flight, and to struggle in her behalf while life remained.

While life remained! It was an ugly thought, for more than one voyager in New York Bay had lost life by just such mishaps as this.

What ensued was like a nightmare. Caught by the water the helpless couple were tossed about wildly. The water bubbled about them, and they seemed to be turning somersets by the dozen. In the whirlpool of froth they were utterly impotent, and it was useless to struggle. To Paul it appeared as if a hundred mighty arms were giving him blow after blow, and that his person was being torn to pieces.

Would it be a death-grapple?

The tumult gradually subsided. True, they were tossed and rocked, and there was no sense of blows, and through the foam the boy began to see once more. He saw, too, that the steamer was going on its way as serenely as if nothing had occurred, while they were left in the area of froth which marked its departure.

Singularly enough, he had succeeded in keeping his grasp upon Alice, and they were still companions in the adventure. He looked at her face, but the darkness was such that it was not until she spoke that he knew whether she was conscious.

"Be you alive?" he had asked.

"Yes," was her brave reply, "and not seriously hurt. But you—you?"

"I'm in the swim!" returned Paul, with unexpected levity. "Yes, we're both in the swim, an' likely ter remain there unless our best foes pull us out. Where be they?"

It did not take long to get a reply to the question. The second boat had escaped being overturned by a narrow margin, and was tossing on the disturbed water only a few fathoms away.

"Keep mum!" Paul ordered. "They're looking fer us. They ain't ketched on yet—lay low, an' they may not. Lay low!"

One of the enemy stood up in the boat and looked all around. His form was only indistinctly visible to those in the water, and Paul gained fresh hope that they would be able to avoid being seen, themselves. He was supporting himself easily, making no effort to advance in any direction, and awaiting the turn of events.

Evidently the standing man did not see anything of interest. He raised his voice carefully.

"Hallo!" he called.

"Go ter Halifax!" muttered Paul.

There was a brief silence.

"Hallo!"

The call came once more, but with as poor results as before. Then the hailer settled down and the pursuers began to row.

"This is the pinch," commented Paul. "Keep mighty shady, an' they may pass us by."

There was not much to be seen of the two in the water, and the blackness of the night prevented that much from being observed unless the boat drew near at hand. Alice was again proving her courage, and, fortunately, was not a drag upon her companion. If not a really skillful swimmer she had what was far more important, and that was good judgment. This it was which encouraged him so much.

Another crisis was approaching, however, and as the boat drew closer Paul wished he could

sink into the water wholly. Would the discovery be avoided?

Keenly the pursuers looked around.

"It's dollars ter doughnuts they were drowned," ventured a man in the boat.

"Don't think it," replied Mike. "That gal is cunnin' as the Evil One. Mebbe she has ketched onto the steamer ez it passed."

"Don't be absurd. Either they are drowned, or they are now floating in the water. Look sharp!"

Slowly dipping their oars they came closer to the pair in the very path of the boat. Paul made a few careful strokes and somewhat avoided the dreaded collision, and then he rested and awaited the result.

The pursuers came abreast of them. A few feet more would settle the case. Which way would it go?

Still the oars were dipped, and the nearness of the danger was alarming. Not a word could the fugitives speak. Then the bow passed them—more strokes were made—the boat went past.

Silently Paul began to move the other way.

"Brace up!" he whispered to Alice. "The game is goin' our way. Be cool, an' there ain't no sort o' danger."

The assurance was premature, in point of fact, but it did not prove so in any other degree. The foe receded, and Paul chuckled in glee.

"We're the people!" he declared.

"Look! There is our own boat!" Alice exclaimed.

It was there, and right side 'p. The sight gave Paul a fresh idea.

"Hold ter yer grip!" he ordered. "We'll be in that craft in the twinklin' of an eye, b'jinks!"

His plan occurred to Alice, and to her it seemed much better than to float around in the river. Paul swam lustily, and they were soon beside the boat. What came next was no easy task, but he knew the art well, and after a brief endeavor they gained the interior of the coveted refuge. Paul breathed a sigh of relief.

"Looks ter me as ef we're likely ter see New York all right," he chuckled.

"Can't we go back to the shanty on the pier?" she asked, eagerly.

"Go back?" echoed Paul, in astonishment.

"Yes, to get the sick man, there."

The full scope of the daring plan flashed upon the boy.

"B'jinks!" he cried, "we kin, an' we will!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FIGHTING TO THE END.

PAUL O' the Piers was by no means fresh after his long struggle with the waves, but his courage was as good as ever. He grasped the oars and began to row with zeal.

"We'll hev that there sick man in a brace o' shakes!" he declared.

"Thank you, very much. I think he is a man whom I am anxious, most anxious to see."

"I know—Isaac Ogden."

"I see you overheard the talk at the shanty."

"A few."

Paul did not think it necessary to explain that his knowledge of Isaac was not limited to the events on the pier, and all his attention was given to the present work. His stout efforts took them fast toward the Jersey shore, and as they saw no more of the pursuers, there was nothing to prevent a quick journey.

As they neared the pier both strained their eyes but saw nothing of any person thereon. A hurried consultation led to the mutual belief that all the men had gone in the boat, and Paul made haste to put the bow against the pier. Then, while Alice remained where she was, he scrambled up and made quick steps along the way to the shanty.

The door was closed.

What lay beyond?

With speedy but cautious movements he opened the door. All was still. Lightly he crossed the floor of the outer room and went to the inner one. It was a moment of keen suspense as he looked beyond, but it was soon over.

One person, only, was in the room, and he was the sick man on the couch. Paul laughed cheerfully and made one more dash. Leaning over the supposed Isaac Ogden he shook him slightly and exclaimed:

"Say, mister, be you awake?"

There was no reply, and the eyes did not open.

"Git a move on ef you kin!" added Paul, coaxingly. "I'm a friend, an' this is your chance ter make a bolt fer liberty. Wiggle, neighbor, wiggle!"

It was a vain appeal, and he accepted the inevitable.

"Knocked out!" he tersely commented, and then he seized the sick man and made a start for the door.

Paul was strong for his years, and though the burden was heavy he did not falter. Well aware that it was usage by no means agreeable or safe for one in that condition, he thought the end justified the means and hauled away cheerfully.

Rough as the mode of locomotion was, it did not bring any sign of consciousness from the man. His condition seemed desperate enough to warrant the most serious fears, and Paul was not sure but he was taking risks for nothing, but he was bound to stand by Alice at all hazards.

There was nobody to dispute his departure, and the edge of the pier was reached in safety. There the boat was in waiting, with Alice looking anxiously.

"All correct!" quoth Paul, cheerfully.

"What does he say?" she asked, quickly.

"He says he ain't in it. In other words, he ain't a-sayin' a word. Silent ez the grave, he is, an' unconscious ez the hills o' Staten Island. Down he comes!"

The rescuer poised his burden over the gap.

"Don't let him fall!" cried Alice.

"Nixey, but down he must come. Ease him away a bit, an' I'll do what I kin. Oh! we won't hurt him."

Paul justified his confidence by lowering the man without doing harm, and once more he took the oars.

"The river's the only way," he commented.

"What if we meet the enemy?"

"Then they must give us elbow-room or we'll use them severe."

The speaker did not feel the courage he expressed, but he relied a good deal upon the chance that there would be no such meeting. He did his best by rowing promptly and vigorously, and the craft left the pier.

The river seemed to have grown even darker than before, and Paul's hopes rose, but Alice, peering ahead, suddenly exclaimed:

"A boat!"

Her companion ceased rowing.

"It's coming this way," she added.

"Don't breathe, an' they may pass us!"

Paul spoke very cautiously, and then, not venturing to make a stroke, held himself in readiness for action. It was too late to get out of the way, and all depended on whether the other craft would pass without its occupants seeing them. There was a small chance of that—would it materialize?

Alice suddenly caught Paul's arm.

"It is they!" she whispered.

Not a word replied Paul. He had recognized Mike and his allies, but, in any case, he had nothing to say.

Nearer came the boat.

"I want to get the sick man out o' the way immediately," spoke one of the other crew.

Paul chuckled.

"Et won't be much work, ole hoss!" he muttered.

Now the boat was abreast the fugitives. All of the men were looking straight ahead. While doing that they were not dangerous, but, if they turned their heads, discovery was sure to result.

It was a period of keenest suspense.

Paul drew a deep breath. The other craft had passed them, and the chances were far greater for their own success. A few steps further he let them go, and then his own oars touched the water again. His progress was resumed, and the darkness began to swallow them up.

Mike and his gang went on toward the dock.

"Row, row!" Alice urged.

"That's jest w'ot I'm doin'," replied Paul, calmly. "Don't you hev no fear, fer I'll gamble they won't do us no more harm. The noble old North River is swallowin' us up, now, and they might ez wal try ter find a needle in a haymow. Oh! we're the people, an' don't you forget it!"

He felt all the confidence he expressed, now, and under his lusty strokes the boat went on with a rush. Even when the enemy found they had been outdone there would be no danger of successful pursuit.

The battle was indeed, won!

They drew near the New York shore gradually, and as Alice gained a measure of courage, herself, she began to think of the near future. What was to be done with the unconscious man? The new idea in her mind was enough to make her very anxious to see him under different circumstances; to talk with him, and learn if he was, indeed, Isaac Ogden.

"I wish to get him to my home," she explained to Paul. "How can it be done?"

"Hire a coach."

"Can it be done?"

"Sure! Wait until we touch."

He was aiming for a pier where he was known, realizing the importance of such a thing in case a policeman should investigate, and he soon put the boat into the dock as desired.

After that, all was simple enough. He found aid from his friends there. A carriage was summoned and the sick man safely placed within.

Alice gave due orders and the vehicle rolled away.

Her residence was on Twelfth street, and as there was nothing more to interrupt their progress they soon reached it. Their charge was taken inside; they followed; the carriage was dismissed; and then attention was given to the charge. There could be but one result of this—the need of a doctor was apparent to all, and one, therefore, was quickly summoned.

He found that the patient was suffering from wounds which, serious under any circumstances, had become aggravated by neglect, and he was then in a critical condition.

All that was possible was done by the good doctor; then he went away.

Paul had taken care "not to get left in the shuffle," as he expressed it, and it was natural that Alice should gravitate to his side when she had done what she could.

"I wish I knew if he is Isaac Ogden!" she murmured, half unconsciously.

"I'll find out for you," declared Paul, confidently.

"What do you know about him?"

"Nothin' muck, ez a man, but there is them who know his looks ez wal ez I do yours, an' I kin produce them folks—though it's a bit late fer any sech step, now."

After what had occurred Alice could not suspect him of trifling with her, and she quickly added:

"I don't see how you know of him."

"I know where he lived, an' them who took care o' him, an' a bit more than that. I've got inter the swim somewhat in this case, an' ef you see fit ter take me inter it further I don't reckon you'll be sorry fer it, I don't. I've got ter take sides in this case, an' my inclinations all say, side with this gal here. Why can't we sorter git tergether an' help each other?"

It was an unexpected proposal, and Alice had many questions to ask before she was willing to be confidential in return. Paul's straightforward manner had due effect, however, and she saw fit to speak plainly.

"If this sick man is Isaac Ogden, it is of vast value to me that I establish the fact."

"You want them papers?"

"Decidedly, I do!"

"Why?"

"They are those left with him by the late Mr. Seagrief. Many persons would tell you I am a relative of Mr. Seagrief. That is not so, strictly. He was my mother's step-brother, yet not one whom I saw often in life. He was a politician, and a man who had work to do which is not without stain. Perhaps he meant to be honest, yet I know he forgot all but success when he was engaged in the work."

"Other politicians are built that way!" dryly remarked Paul o' the Piers.

"Although not a relative he is generally supposed to be, and his name and that of his step-sister, my mother, are linked in public memory. Aught that affected him injuriously would affect her memory in the same way—and I am so fearful that those papers would put him in a bad light that I am resolved they shall not become public property if I can help it."

"B'jinks! I'm with ye!" Paul cried.

CHAPTER XV.

A DESPERATE RESORT.

EARLY the next morning Paul went toward the house where Isaac Ogden had lived for so long. He had told Alice that Amy Dunn could say definitely whether the sick man was Ogden. Alice had urged him away on the trip, and awaited the return with anxiety.

The delay was not great, and Paul put in an appearance with a small girl in charge. His face was serious, but he came to business with his usual airy fashion.

"Alice, this here is Miss Amy Dunn. What she's done deponent don't say, but that's her name, jest the same. See? Wal, Amy, look yer finest, an' race the music as ef you wa'n't afeerd of the fife."

Alice scarcely heard this characteristic address. She was somewhat disappointed in Amy, whose simple nature was in part expressed in

her face, but she found Amy could talk in a straightforward way when she knew what she was talking about.

She was taken in to see the sick man, and her verdict came promptly.

"That's Isaac!"

Paul breathed a sigh of relief. After all the talk about the missing man it was a relief indeed to find some one who could say something definite about it.

"He has fallen among thieves," observed Alice.

"Yes; an' their name is Russell," added Paul.

"Guess they tried ter kill him," supplemented Amy.

Alice had not been told of this feature of the affair, but she was quickly enlightened. All the facts which had been passed by so lightly by Amy had a meaning to Alice, as they had to Paul, and they could not doubt that Isaac had received his injuries from the Russells. Why they had tried to get rid of him was not plain, but it was certain they had assaulted him in the house and then conveyed him—thinking, perhaps, he was dead—to the place where he had been found by Martin.

Matters had worked much better for Isaac than for his foes, since he received his hurt.

Certain things told by Amy gave still more light to Paul and Alice. The Russells had not seemed to get the satisfaction out of their crime that Irad had expected, and even he had become nervous since the deed was done.

Amy had become an object of suspicion and close scrutiny. She had been in the house when the murder was attempted, and though there was nothing to show she knew of any incriminating circumstance, they had the fear of her which crime always has for anything which may arise against it.

"They're afraid o' her," remarked Paul to Alice, "an' she ought not ter go back there."

"Of course she will not. I'll care for her."

"She may hev ter go back," decided the boy shadower. "You want them papers?"

"Certainly; and, what is more, I must have them."

"Wal, in spite o' the resks we run, I think we don't want ter go too fast on this matter. We might go there by day, but Russell would be on hand like a rooster ter the dough-dish, an how could we get them dockymunts? I say le's take our time an' wait fer night. Shall we?"

"I dread this delay," Alice confessed, nervously.

"Better go slow than ter fail in haste."

"Couldn't I buy Russell up?"

"Ogden had the papers. Russell killed him as nigh dead ez he dared. S'pose we come ter see him, won't he think we're after his murderous secret an' so balk us?"

"That may be."

Alice saw the force of the argument, and her reply was given with a sigh. Haste might ruin all; that was plain. Still, there was much to be said, and she meditated deeply on the question before she gave way. In the end it was decided that they should delay until after dark, and until the Russells were supposed to be asleep.

Then all must be risked.

It was unfortunate that the chief risk must fall upon Amy, but, as they were not house-breakers, it was thought necessary to have an ally in the Russell residence. Amy, on being questioned, declared readily that she had no fear on that point. Her decision amounted to nothing, for the others saw more clearly than she could that she might be in the greatest peril if she went back, but as no one could say positively that the Russells contemplated harm to her, it was at last settled in that way.

She left the house before her absence was likely to be commented upon and went homeward.

Paul had not forgotten certain other persons, and as Alice did not refer to them, he did.

"Say, where's Mirabeau and Joyce?" he asked.

"Gone!" Alice announced, somewhat curtly.

"Where?"

"I have not seen them of late."

"Have they skipped the r-i-l-a-la?"

"I will be frank enough to say that Mirabeau has disappeared and taken Joyce with him. I can only suspect that Mirabeau has proven false to me—that he was always a traitor at heart, and my enemy. More than that I do not care to say."

Paul did not press the subject. Alice did not seem disposed to be confidential, and he had an idea he might learn something by his own efforts.

He had not forgotten his engagement with Avery, and he went to the house, though without any great hope of being able to learn any-

thing. On his arrival he found the place deserted, and nothing to be discovered of Avery.

Returning to Alice, he killed time until nine o'clock, when he and the girl went to the vicinity of the Russell residence. Leaving her, he, alone, went close to the house. Something he saw at an upper window caused him to smile with satisfaction. A white cloth was visible, there—the signal expected from Amy.

"We'll make it yet!" Paul murmured.

Taking up his stand he waited until, an hour later, the lights were extinguished in the building, and then returned to where Alice awaited his return.

"All right!" he announced.

"Did you see Amy?"

"No, but the flag is out."

"We forgot to tell her at what time it was to be shown, and it occurs to me she may have put it out so early that we really can tell nothing by it. I should much rather know she is safe than to see the bit of cloth."

It was a fact well stated, but they tried to console themselves with the idea that they would find everything satisfactory, and then walked on to the Russell residence.

Paul moved to the area and knocked at the basement door.

It was a light tap, but sufficiently loud so that it must be heard by any one listening for it. He paused, but the door was not opened and no footstep sounded within. He knocked again.

Silence continued.

It was not until all reasonable delay had been tried that Paul returned to Alice and reported the result.

"I'm afraid that small girl has got into trouble," he declared.

"Perhaps she has fallen asleep."

"That ain't her way. Amy ain't the brightest gal I've seen, but she's as loyal ez you kin find them. No, I'm afeerd she's been set down on."

"Can they have killed her?"

"Dunno! You can't bet on killers."

"What is to be done?"

"Ef she don't show up ter let us in pretty soon, I've got ter go in anyhow, of my own accord."

"How can that be done?"

"I've been usin' my eyes, an' I reckon I kin see the way clear. The castle ain't burglar-proof, by a long shot. One o' the parlor winders is open a bit, an' all I hev ter do is ter crawl ter the balcony an' jest go in. See?"

"It may come to that. I am glad the way is open. Would it not be well to avail ourselves of it right away?"

"I don't think it. I'd like a report from Amy ef we can git one, afore we make a break. Still, we won't wait long."

They did not wait long. Amy did not appear, and after some delay they decided to waste no more valuable time. There was no knowing what might occur which would work to their disadvantage.

Alice insisted upon bearing her share of the danger and responsibility, and when Paul moved to the window she went the same way. He had not miscalculated the condition of the window, and it was ajar as desired. He got upon the balcony, and then, raising the sash, listened attentively. Nothing was to be heard within.

"Come on!"

He spoke in a whisper to Alice, and crawled through the window.

To him the venture was only one which furnished pleasant excitement, but it meant far more to her. The family honor was at stake, and the next few moments, she believed, would settle the results of all the various plots then in operation.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NIGHT ATTEMPT.

AMY had given a description of the house as good as her wits would allow, and Paul did not have to move wholly at random, but even the description made it hard to get over a house he had no acquaintance with. Every second he expected to fall over a chair, and thus bring Irad Russell and his wife upon them.

Well up in the building was the desk where, it was hoped, Isaac Ogden had the papers of Mr. Seagrief stored, and in that line Paul took his march, with Alice Vanner close behind him.

The leader was more uneasy than he had admitted to Alice. He could not understand why Amy should go back on them so oddly, and could not get rid of the unpleasant fear that she had

been captured by Irad. If this had occurred, what had been done with her, since?

He found the front hall and began the ascent of the stairs, and all the while silence hung over them.

Up, up, he went, and finally drew near the room where the desk was said to be. Thus far no sound had occurred to arouse fear, and Alice, at least, was in better spirits than before. A little more of success and all would be well.

They had brought a dark lantern, and when the door was closed the light was turned on. Except for their presence the room was without human occupant, but, what was a good deal better, the desk stood where they had expected.

"Victory!" Alice whispered.

"Ye-es."

Paul answered hesitatingly, for he was not sure of the victory. One point gained did not make triumph assured. He quickly added:

"We'll git ter work like a hustler from 'way-back. Here's to biz!"

He tried the desk and found it locked. The key was nowhere visible, and both he and Alice felt a strong reluctance to anything which approached burglarious efforts, but they had already taken the first step in breaking into the house, while they were not so situated that they could split hairs or delay in the task they had undertaken.

The lock must be broken, and they were not without means of doing this. A hatchet had been brought, and with this Paul attacked the impediment.

"It's a short job," he encouragingly remarked.

The lock had begun to give way when the boy abruptly paused.

"Footsteps!" he exclaimed.

One moment longer he delayed; then he caught Alice by the arm.

"Get out o' sight!" he directed, hurriedly.

He had observed a closet at one side, and toward this he shoved his companion. His zeal made the delay but brief, and it was well it was so. They had scarcely gained the shelter when the door to the hall opened. Peering out, he saw a woman.

She was tall and thin, and haggard of face, and the white night garments she wore made her look so ghostly that he felt a little thrill of uneasiness.

The possibility that they had been seen or heard was soon done away with. She did not look at the closet, or around the room as one would if in search of a particular person, but with her gaze directed to one point, only, she walked toward the desk. Paul moved uneasily. What did she want of it? Even if her desires were simple, the marks of his hatchet were there, and she could not fail to see them if she looked with any degree of closeness.

She laid a hand on the desk and then, gazing at vacancy, sighed deeply.

"The accursed thing haunts me!" she murmured. "Why isn't it gone with the rest? Why should anything remind me of that night? It keeps the horror alive!"

Paul touched Alice's arm.

"Russell's wife, I'll bet a cookey!" he ventured.

There was a lull. For no visible reason she kept her position and continued to stare at vacancy. There was much of the ghostly in all this, and it might have alarmed any one but practical persons.

Something drew Paul's attention to the door, again. He saw it pushed a little further back, and then the face of a man appeared at the aperture. It was Irad Russell.

The latter's expression was dark and forbidding, and the harbinger of a storm. It was a trifle reassuring to the adventuresome couple that he gazed only at his wife. Suddenly he started and, with soft steps, crossed the floor. Mrs. Russell did not hear him until he as suddenly laid his hand on her arm.

She started and uttered a cry of terror.

As her face was thus revealed it bore an expression of dismay and horror.

Russell muttered a curse.

"What fool idea has sent you here?" he demanded, sharply. "What are you mooning around of nights for? Why don't you keep in bed?"

She hesitated, sighed, and seemed to realize, for the first time, that she was with a human being and not a ghost. Sadly she replied:

"I can't sleep."

"Who asked you to sleep? Who cares whether you sleep or not? What if you don't sleep? Is that any reason why you should go

wandering around like an unquiet spirit? Hang it all! your fool ways make me weary. Do you hear? Weary! Sick! Disgusted!"

"Oh! Irad, you don't know!"

"I know you're a fool."

"I can't help what I feel; the deed we did sits heavily on my conscience. Isaac Ogden was not a bad man, but we became bad. Oh! if I could bring his life back I never would do harm to him again—no, nor to any human being."

Mrs. Russell wrung her hands, and her husband caught her angrily by the arm.

"Woman!" he hissed, "if you don't let up on all this I'll do you up in the same way Ogden was done up. What's done is done, and I swear I won't have you go mooning around and telling everybody about that case. We did Isaac up, and we had good cause."

"Nothing can excuse the shedding of human blood."

"Bah! We were his heirs, and when he refused to settle up the business he and I were once in together, and wouldn't come to terms at all, it was time for him to go off the hooks. What did it matter? We were his heirs; we got the bulge on him before death's ordinary instruments could; and he had outlived his usefulness, anyhow."

"His blood haunts me!"

Irad took his wife roughly by the throat.

"I have a good mind to do you up!" he grated.

She shrunk away.

"Don't, don't!" she gasped.

His hand fell away, and he seemed to listen closely.

"Some one is stirring in the hall!" he muttered. "Can that girl have—"

He did not finish the sentence. A man appeared at the door, and watchful Paul grew wonder-struck as he saw it was no stranger to him.

It was Mirabeau!

The latter took one good look and then entered quickly. Other men came after him, and all were armed with revolvers—a stern and ominous-looking gang, truly, and not one any man would like to see in his home at that hour.

Mirabeau presented his weapon at Russell's head.

"Not one word if you would save your own life!" he exclaimed.

The array of revolvers was not to be trifled with, and the fact was duly impressed on the mind of the observer.

"We are here with a purpose," added Mirabeau, "and if you would live to see the sun rise, you don't want to interfere with that purpose. Do you understand?"

The nature of the man was expressed in the speech. It was stern, cold and unfeeling—it told how inexorably he would follow out a purpose, and Russell was not slow to realize the fact.

There was something more than fear which moved the master of the house—at that moment there was no visible reason why he should be in dread of the revolver, since he was not directly threatened, but he stared at Mirabeau in speechless terror.

"Are you disposed to yield?" added the intruder.

"Are you an officer?" faltered Russell.

Mirabeau could not see the significance of the question as Paul could, but he was quick-witted enough to find the key, in part, without much delay. His forehead knit for an instant, and then he coolly replied:

"Whatever I am, you are to obey me without a murmur if you want to live. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

Russell's meekness continued, and the visitor went on:

"You have the papers of one Seagrief, an politician. Where are those papers?"

"What do you want of them?"

"That's my business. You have only to hand them over. Will you do so at once?"

Unconsciously Russell's eyes were turned toward the desk, and Mirabeau did not fail to understand.

"Break that thing open!" he ordered, addressing his men.

They moved forward promptly. Paul touched Alice.

"Be we goin' ter get beat out?" he asked, in a cautious tone.

"We must not—we must have them, ourselves," she answered, with agitation. "What can we do?"

"It was just what Paul did not know. Things had been bad enough when the Russells came, but the addition of other men to the force op-

posed to them was absolutely disheartening. Every one who desired the Seagrief papers appeared to have gained clew to their whereabouts, and the chase grew warm. How could Alice and he, alone, hope to fight against such odds?

The men had come prepared, and the task of searching the desk was but short. It was opened, and those who only desired the papers for selfish reasons were likely to gain the prize, while Alice, working with a praiseworthy motive, had no chance, as far as could be seen.

"Good!" commented Mirabeau. "I'll soon see what is there."

He advanced, but at that moment another voice suddenly sounded at the door:

"Hold!"

The command drew the attention of all to that point, and Paul, looking with the rest, saw another familiar face.

It was that of Avery!

"Stop where you are!" added the last speaker, sternly, "or it will be your last step on earth. Stop!"

Silence followed the order. Avery and Mirabeau glared hatred. If mere looks had been deadly, great execution would have been done then. A faint smile stole over Paul's face; he thought he realized the situation. The two men represented the rival political factions of the hour—the factions that were trying to secure dead Seagrief's papers for a selfish end, while the only unselfish seeker for the papers—Alice—was not in the competition. Paul smiled to see the two in rivalry, but a grave expression came upon the heels of the other.

Was there chance for Alice?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

MIRABEAU recovered his composure and resumed the old, cold smile which was so much like ice.

"May I ask," he haughtily inquired, "by what right you intrude here? You are on private ground, and will be arrested if you do not get off of it at once."

His assurance was refreshing, but Avery was not disconcerted:

"You can spare your airs," he retorted; "I know as much about this as you do. We are here for the same purpose, and the victory will go to the fittest. Spare your airs, I say, and let the winner be whoever can get the lead."

And Avery looked at his superior force with confidence.

Mirabeau turned to Russell.

"Order this man and his gang out!" he directed.

If he expected his command to be obeyed he was mistaken; Russell was too much frightened to take sides with either, so remained silent.

The parley was not continued. Avery had the superior force, and did not delay action. Motioning to his followers, as one man they sprung forward, and in a twinkling all were engaged in strife. It was to be noticed that nobody evinced a disposition to do bodily harm to his adversary, and the fight, warm as it was, did not threaten bloodshed.

In this scrimmage Paul saw his own chance.

"Hold yer breath!" he whispered to Alice; then he stole lightly from the closet.

His daring plan occurred to her, and she watched breathlessly.

The desk was open, and the papers inside were exposed to view. There was now no one to guard them, so really the interior was open to his hand.

The bundles of papers were not numerous, and his attention was soon attracted to one package of somewhat impressive appearance. This he seized quickly. It was tied with a string, and on the wrapper he saw the words, in bold writing:

"SEAGRIEF."

"Private Property."

Paul chuckled. He might be holding something of no value, but he was quite of another opinion. He thrust the package into his pocket and turned to find Alice by his side.

"Is it what we want?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, an' the next thing we want is ter hustle!" he added, promptly.

They did not tarry. There was no one to obstruct their going, and they hastened from the room.

"Out o' doors in a twinklin'!" ordered Paul. "Don't let no grass grow under our feet."

The plan was well laid, but, as they were descending the stairs an unexpected obstacle appeared in the shape of other men who were stationed at the foot thereof! They barred the way.

"You will stop right here," one of them announced.

"Not much!" and the resolute boy sprung at the speaker, but only to be ruthlessly seized and speedily reduced to a state of helplessness.

"Stay where you are!" was the cool order. It was hard luck, for it came at the moment when he thought escape assured.

But, the young shadower was not at his wits' end. He yet had a trump card to play.

"Say, we'll buy you off!" he declared. "Do you represent Mirabeau or Avery? An' what is your price?"

The question was business-like, but it was met with silent disdain. Not a word of answer did he get, and before he could think of another dodge Mirabeau was seen coming down the stairs.

He gazed at Paul and smiled.

"What have you here?" he asked.

"A boy who tried to leave the house, sir. According to your orders that we arrest every one who tried to go out, we seized him and the young woman."

Mirabeau addressed Alice.

"I think the boy is with you?"

"Yes," she replied, mechanically.

"Release them both!"

The command was so unexpected that Paul could hardly credit the fact when it was obeyed. Mirabeau surprised all by smiling.

"Miss Vanner, I suppose you think me a traitor?" he added.

"You did desert me."

"Do you know why?"

"No."

"It was because I was not in full sympathy with your plans. I was not opposed to them, but I had other interests. I have assumed the role of a man bound up in political matters, but, in point of fact, I care nothing for politics. Neither am I such a stern and zealous disciple of narrow personal aims as you think. In brief, I am a detective!"

"A detective!" gasped Paul, astonished.

"Even so! I have played a part with you all, but, really it is nothing to me what becomes of the papers of James Seagrief. All this seeming interest on my part has been to hide other things—the things which have actually occupied my time."

"Then why have you assumed to be interested in my affairs, and deserted me in the hour of my need?" Alice demanded, not by any means convinced.

"Because a certain case I was on brought me in contact with you and the things nearest your mind at that time. A detective cannot always choose his ways. I deceived you, but you'll find it was not to do harm to your cause. Now I know all, you have my support, and I'll stand by you as loyally as you wish."

"And your object?"

"To learn who tried to kill—who *had* killed, I thought at one time, for I did not know the truth—Isaac Ogden. Irad Russell and his wife did this deed. They got rid of the body. Enough was seen and reported to me to put me on the track. From that hour Russell and his wife have been under my notice at all times—my men have watched unceasingly."

"Yet, you talked of Seagrief's papers—"

"Of course, since I learned of them as I went on. I care nothing for them, as if, as I think is the fact, you have them there, you are welcome to them. I did not know who had been assaulted by Russell, and could not arrest the latter at once. Now, it seems that a man named Martin picked Ogden up, and the latter still lives. Russell has been arrested, and the law will take its course."

Mirabeau was a very different person now, and as it dawned upon his hearers that he was what he claimed, the change seemed greater than it would have done otherwise.

"We were all delayed," he went on, "by mistaking a certain Joyce for Isaac Ogden. I know all about Joyce, too. He was once Ogden's servant, but was dismissed long ago. When he was accused of being Ogden he dared say nothing because he had been dismissed from service as an embezzler, and to own up that he was the ex-servant, and had been mistaken for Ogden for that very cause, would have been to invite too much attention. He denied he was Ogden, but dared not say who he was. I have him in a safe place, and he has told all."

"Wal, by mighty, mister, you've done well!" Paul declared.

"As for the cause of Russell's attack on Ogden I will say that Russell over-persuaded Ogden to put money into a business venture with him some time ago, and when it went wrong Russell tried to have Ogden give him money so he would

not lose anything. Ogden was no longer young, and did not deal with the circumstances as he would have done when a younger man. He got frightened, and with cause—Russell tried to kill him, hoping to get all his money at one grasp. But Ogden lives, and Russell will be duly tried for his crime."

All the rest of the house-intruders came down-stairs at that moment. Avery and his men were prisoners, and it was to be seen they had not dived in politics with success.

Mirabeau let them go out of the house, under guard, without comment.

"Keep Seagrief's papers," he then added. "His reputation shall be preserved. No good could be done by raking up old scores and old crimes. Let them be buried. You have the papers. Keep them!"

The Pier Shadower was enthusiastic.

"Mister," he declared, "the more I think of it the more I reckon you have done well. Here's my fin!"

He extended his hand to Mirabeau gravely, and the latter smiled and shook the hand with cordiality.

"There are bigger fools than you, boy," he admitted. "You have established the fact that you have a plucky spirit and a shrewd wit, and I dare say Miss Alice will not see you want for a home in the future."

"I owe him much, everything!" declared Alice. "He and I shall be friends from this time on."

"Well said. Let me add, Miss Vanner, that your malicious enemy, Mike, has been gathered in by my men, and he is not likely to go forth among his kind to annoy any one for some time to come. I don't see but your future is all right—thanks to Paul."

And when Alice remembered all Paul had done, she realized how true the compliment was, and was resolved that he should be well rewarded.

The detective's prompt efforts put an end to the attempt to get Seagrief's papers and make use of them, and no more was heard on that head. It was too late, anyhow, for Alice had seized the first chance and burned all that could have done any harm.

The family honor was saved, and there the matter rested.

Avery was not tried, for he was not so bad as he might have been, but Mike, Ben and Barnes went to prison in due time.

Joyce and Ogden recovered from their injuries. Joyce left the city at once, but Ogden continued to reside there, and when Russell was tried and convicted, his danger was over.

Alice took charge of both Paul and Amy, and under her care a very different future was opened to both. Nothing of importance could be expected from simple-minded Amy, but Paul had the keenness and courage which foretold a life of usefulness and success.

Under Alice's guidance and influence he soon found a place in a prominent shipping-house, and the gamin of the piers promises now to become the manager of piers and a water-front "chief."

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- 514 Broadway Billy's Boodle; or, Clearing a Strange Case.
- 536 Broadway Billy's "Dinkitty."
- 557 Broadway Billy's Death Racket.
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- 628 Broadway Billy's Dead Act; or, The League of Seven.
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- 222 Bison Bill's Cluet; or, Grit, the Bravo Sport.

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- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

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